

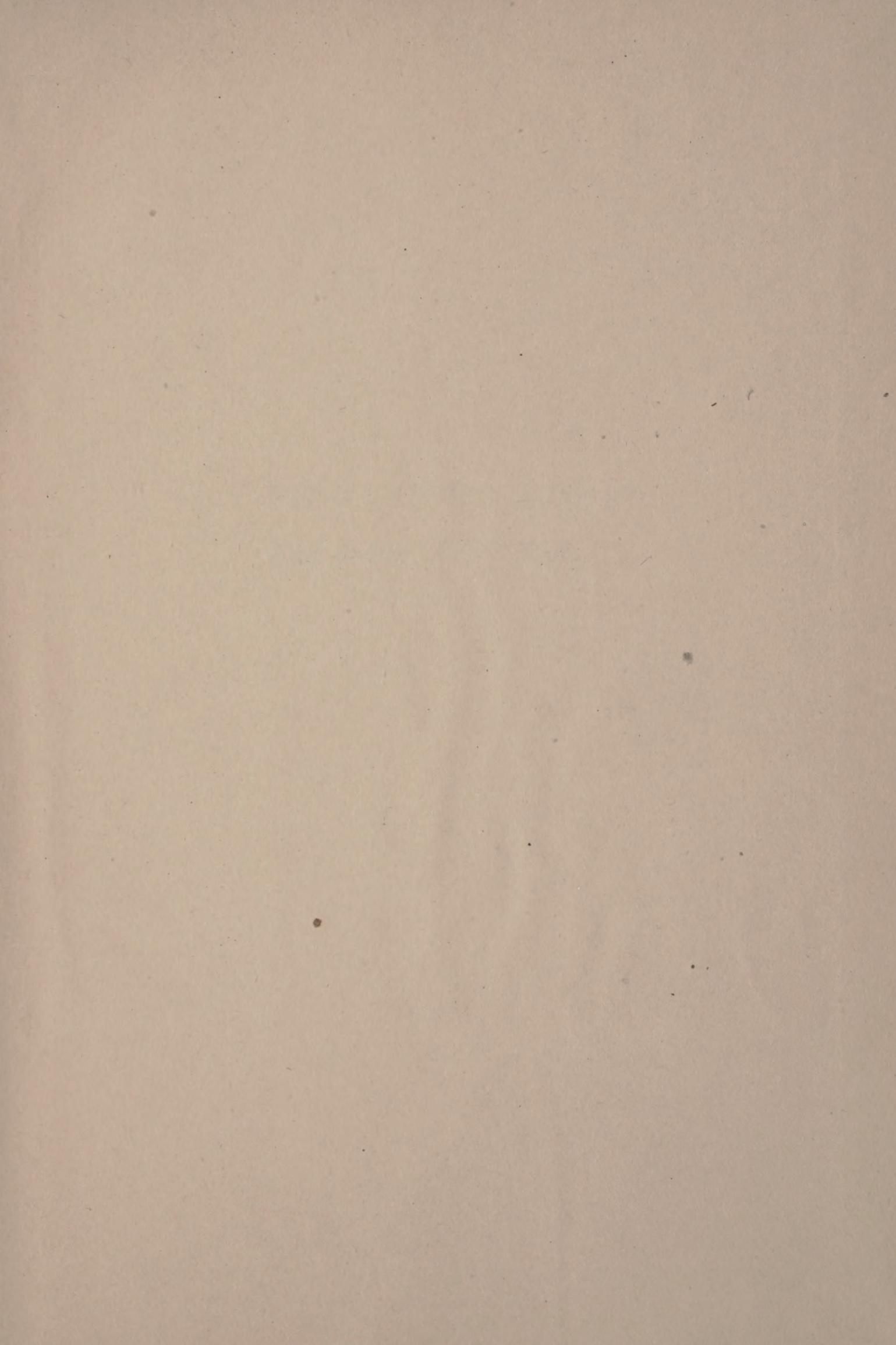


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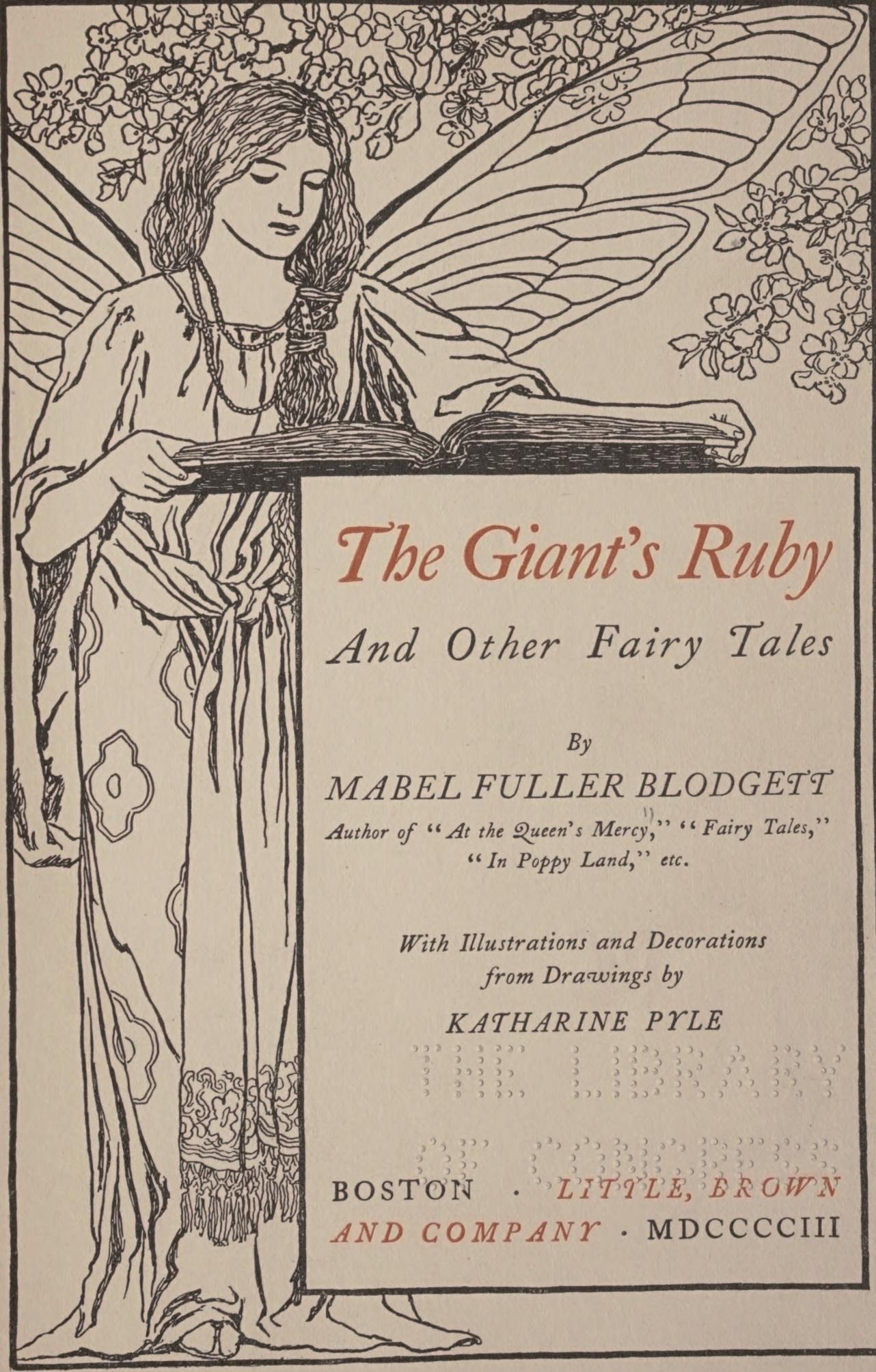
THE GIANT'S RUBY

And Other Fairy Tales

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The Princess combs her
hair at the Ogre's window



The Giant's Ruby

And Other Fairy Tales

By

MABEL FULLER BLODGETT

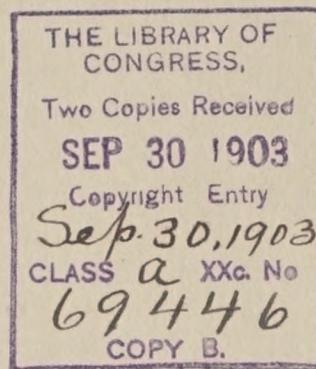
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*With Illustrations and Decorations
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TO
RICHARD ASHLEY BLODGETT
THIS BOOK
IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED BY
HIS MOTHER.

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The Giant's Ruby

and OTHER FAIRY TALES



I

THE GIANT'S RUBY

FAR, far away, in the heart of a mighty forest there stood, grim and old and storm-beaten, a solitary Castle.

So thick grew the trees about it that no sunbeam more than looked in that direction, or if one bolder than the rest did glance in at an upper window, back with frightened haste it would speed to the safe, green, open country. Neither would the birds nest there. You might see a crow, perhaps, or a single raven, but even these, like the sunbeams, made short visits and seemed to flap their great black wings with haste and

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call hoarse warnings one to the other as they sailed away.

On the other hand, the toads and the snakes crept close to the great gray walls, and the bats hung head downward by hundreds in the Castle turrets. Owls perched, too, on the battlements, and the Fog Lady wrapped her mantle many and many a night about it all.

Now, somebody told his neighbor, who whispered it to still another, that the Castle had once been the home of a fierce and mighty Giant; and somebody again told somebody else, who whispered it to *his* neighbor, that the Giant was coming back again.

At this, as you may believe, there was a fine stir among the country-folk; and after a great deal of talking and wagging of heads as well as of tongues, the villagers, whose town lay nearest the forest, decided to seek the Mayor and tell him that it was his plain duty to find out the truth of all these matters.

"Go to the Castle," said they, "and if the Giant isn't there, why, find out when he is coming; and if he is there, why, bid him wel-

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come. Don't for the world let him dream we don't want him back; and offer him just as little as you think he'll be content with: say a couple of pigs a year, and a fat goose or two."

"That's all very well for you," said the Mayor, rubbing his head, for he had thought so hard inventing excuses that it really ached, "that's all right for you, but how about *Me?*" —he said it just like that. "You won't be there to get in trouble if the Giant's in a bad temper, but think of *Me.*"

"We do think of you," cried all the people. "Aren't you the Mayor? Of course you're the one to go. That's what Mayors are for. Here you've had the pick of our fattest fowls right along, and an extra fine turkey every Christmas, just for being Mayor, and now that you can do something and be of a little use, you make all sorts of objections. A pretty fellow you are." And they talked so loud and waved their farming tools about in such an alarming manner that the poor man was forced to agree at once to all that they asked of him.

In an hour, therefore, the Mayor was on his

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way. There was no regular road through the forest, but only a kind of path, and as it was much too far to walk to the Castle, the Mayor was forced to ride. He wasn't much of a horseman, being very short and fat, and his legs *would* get tangled up in his long, ermine-trimmed Mayor's cloak, which the people said he must wear; but they gave him a quiet old farm-horse, and tied him securely into the saddle.

The poor Mayor did hope, oh! so earnestly, that the news about the Giant was n't true. Perhaps the monster didn't own the Castle. Perhaps he wasn't coming back! Perhaps, oh, joy! perhaps there was n't any Giant at all! At this thought the Mayor looked very happy and began to feel very brave; but, alas! on the instant a great shadow fell upon him, and a voice like thunder called out, "Ha! what have we here?"

The farm-horse gave a leap and a plunge, and would have turned round completely, only the path was too narrow; and the Mayor was only held in the saddle by the stout rope that tied him.

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The poor man would have liked to fall on his knees, but was prevented by the same reason, and again the great voice bellowed the question, "What have we here?" The Mayor looked up, and his usually rosy face was white. The Giant stood directly over him.

Now he wasn't such a big Giant, as Giants go, but he looked like a mountain to the Mayor. I suppose, as a matter of fact, only an ordinary man could have hidden in one of the Giant's gloves, and certainly not one of his teeth was larger than your front door, and his staff was only a middling-sized oak-tree. No, he was n't such a big Giant, but, my! he was fierce!

He didn't like to be kept waiting, either, and as the Mayor was too frightened to answer his question, the Giant picked him up, horse and all, and put him in his pocket, and there he kept him till the Hall of the great Castle was reached.

Now the Giant had an Ogress for a grandmother on his father's side, so when the poor Mayor found his voice, and began to talk about pigs and geese as he had been com-

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manded, the Giant's great voice bellowed above him in fury,—

“Pigs, and Geese, indeed! Tell your wretched village folk that I am their lord and master. I'll have once a month the fattest boy and girl in the place—and fat, mind you—fat!” and he pointed his finger at the Mayor, who suddenly felt very fat himself, and shook in his shoes accordingly.

“There's a fine lot of cows you could have instead,” he began in a small voice, “and Neighbor Peterkin owns sheep.” (The Mayor had neither himself, so he thought this a very good way out of the trouble.) But now the Giant was really angry.

“Get you gone with my orders,” he roared in a voice of thunder, “and see that to-morrow at sunset the fattest of your boys and girls be here, or look you, Sir Messenger, you yourself shall be made into a stew.”

“Oh, they couldn't spare Me,” cried the Mayor; and in great alarm he belabored his horse with his whip, and galloped out of the Castle doorway, and on through the forest,

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homeward as fast as the beast could carry him.

You can picture to yourself the kind of welcome he got in the village. The mothers were the angriest, perhaps, but the fathers were mad enough too. The Mayor felt as though he had fallen into a hornet's nest. He kept saying how brave he had been, and how he had argued with the Giant, and how the monster would have only boys and girls — not a grown person. No ! not on any account, — only children received — and perhaps he'd grow tired of the same diet and take to pigs again ; and, anyway, it was n't his fault. But the more he talked the worse matters got.

However, after everybody had said everything to be said, so many times over that everybody was out of breath, the meeting began to break up, and one by one the villagers went to their homes, the fathers scowling, the mothers weeping, with the frightened children clinging to their skirts.

Even the Mayor got away at last. On his own doorstep his face suddenly brightened.

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The very thing! There was the boy who turned the spit in his kitchen, and the girl who fed the chickens. They were orphans. Nobody would care very much if the Giant ate them, and then things would be peaceful for at least another month.

So the Mayor called the children to him. "Here, Hans," he said, "I want you to take this letter and go with your sister to the Giant's Castle. I myself called there to-day, so there's nothing to be afraid of. There, run along like a good boy."

"I'm afraid he'll eat me!" said Hans, "and eat sister too;" and he put his knuckles to his eyes and began to cry.

"Pooh! pooh!" said the Mayor, "a great boy like you crying for nothing! Did he eat me? No. Well, then run along. It's quite likely he won't eat you, either."

The Mayor had made up his mind, and the villagers were pleased enough also. What a couple of children wanted did not signify, so they were packed off early the next morning, and all that troubled the Mayor was the fear

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that the Giant would not find them fat enough and to his liking.

Now a boy may be a turnspit and poor, and yet have a kind heart; and a girl may feed chickens for a living and wear a ragged dress, and yet be as brave and sweet as a Princess,—and that was the way with these two, Hans and Gretel. So, though they trudged along with heavy hearts, they tried to wear smiling faces, each for the other's sake. Of course, they would have run away, had there been any place to run to; but now no villager would shelter them, and in the gloomy forest they would have surely starved, even if some wild beast had not made a meal of them.

“The Giant at least can understand when we beg him to spare us,” said Hans.

“And he may not be *very* hungry when we come in,” faltered poor Gretel.

And talking thus, they reached the Castle. It was the hour of sunset, and the massive doors stood open. Gretel dropped a courtesy, and Hans pulled his forelock, as he had been taught to do.

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"May it please your Giantship, here we are," they said, as they entered the vast Hall.

The Giant had been taking a bit of a nap, for he was tired after a long day at hunting, but the children's voices roused him. He picked them up and stood them on the table, the better to see them.

"Why, that fat Mayor would have made six of you," he growled, while his eyes beneath their heavy brows shone so fiercely that Gretel trembled and clung to her brother.

"I suppose now," went on the Giant in his big voice, "that, like all human children, you're very unreasonable. Perhaps you don't even want to be eaten. How's that? Hey?"

When the Giant said "Hey?" like that, the noise nearly knocked Hans and his sister over; but they tried hard to keep their balance, and both answered as politely as possible, "Indeed, we'd much rather not, may it please your Giantship."

"Well," said the Giant, after a moment's thought. "You see this ring;" and he pointed to a great gold band on his finger with an empty

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space where a stone should be. "I don't care particularly whether I eat you or not, but I do care a great deal about my lost ruby. Some thief!" and here the very rafters shook, "some miserable thief has stolen it. Without it I am cold, yes, cold as ice. With it I am comfortable. Its fires warm me as no mortal blaze can do, and I am content. When I am content and warm, I am not hungry: a sheep for luncheon and an ox or two for dinner, that is enough. But without my ruby I freeze, and when I freeze I hunger, and when I hunger I remember my Ogress grandmother, and when I remember her, I—"

"Oh, yes, yes," spoke up Hans quickly. "Please don't say it."

"Well," said the Giant grimly, "you understand. I am a good-natured fellow enough when I hold my ruby, and it's because of its loss that I am here. A first cousin of mine, who happens to be a Witch, told me to seek help in the Castle, my old home.

'The ruby's fire, mounting higher,
Will show the two what they must do.'

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That's what my cousin the Witch said." He stopped and looked at the children.

"Please, Sir, I'm very good at finding things," said Gretel.

"Yes, indeed, your Giantship," echoed Hans. "She found the Mayoress' breast-pin when she dropped it in the pigsty."

"You're very small," said the Giant doubtfully. "I wonder if the Witch meant you."

"If we're small, we would n't make much of a supper for you," said Hans bravely, "and we could look under things much better and crawl under them too. The ruby might be in a crack."

"Well," said the Giant, "I tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a month, and if you bring me the ruby before the time's up, I'll not eat you, but I will make your fortunes; but you must be back here promptly at supper-time"—the children trembled—"and if you have n't the ruby, nothing can save you. Do you promise?"

"Yes, yes, your Giantship," cried the children eagerly, for really what else could they do?

"It's a magic promise," said the Giant, "and

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you could n't break it if you wanted to. Now be off, and remember — at supper-time — I have it at six in the winter. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Hans, and he slid down the leg of the Giant's table, and assisted his sister to do the same.

The Giant tossed them a gold piece: it was a small one, fortunately, about the size of a dinner plate; the cartwheel size they could not have carried. Then he clapped his hands, and an enormous Owl appeared. "Leave of absence for a month for these two," he said, waving his hand. "Take them to the outskirts of the forest and drop them, but see that you bring them back on time."

The Owl bowed solemnly, and at a further sign from the Giant the two children sat on the bird's broad back, as out through the gathering gloom the great creature floated, the noiseless beating of its strong wings bearing them safely and steadily onward and away.

Indeed, so swift and sure was its flight, that after a little the children dared to look about them; but they saw only a cloudy sky above,

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with a star or two playing at hide-and-seek, and below but the vast and gloomy forest.

Hans and Gretel, therefore, sensibly went to sleep, and when they woke they might have thought it all a dream had not the glitter of the Giant's gold piece dazzled their heavy eyes.

The Owl had disappeared, the forest was at their back, the open country stretched before them, and the silver roof of a queer-looking structure gleamed bright in the morning sun, not very far away.

"What a strange place! It seems to be on stilts," said Gretel, as, hand in hand, brother and sister trudged along.

"I hope we'll get something to eat there," answered Hans. "I think I'd almost rather find some breakfast this morning than even the Giant's ruby."

"But I've some black bread, brother, in my apron pocket, and see, there's a brook, and—quick! isn't that a honeycomb in the heart of that old tree?" cried Gretel.

So, as you may believe, it did not take long for the two children to make a hearty meal;

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and the sweet air blowing on their faces, the feeling of freedom, together with their hunger, made the simple food taste as never before.

It was with fresh courage, therefore, that they pressed forward, and it was not long before they saw that what they had taken for a building was really a monster Stork, standing on its stilt-like legs, and preening its snowy feathers with its long bill.

Hans and Gretel had been through such wonderful adventures already that they were not much surprised when the Stork fixed its sharp eyes upon them, and called to them to stop.

“Dear me! dear me!” it said, raising itself up and down on its toes in quite a remarkable manner, “what are you doing here, children? Who would have thought it! Is there no place where one can be quiet? There, there, don’t come any nearer. You might wake up the babies! Dear! dear! dear! I forgot to ask, do you like babies?”

“Yes, Sir,” began Gretel; but the Stork looked much offended.

“Yes, Madam,” it snapped.

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"Oh, forgive me, we do like them indeed, Madam, but my brother and I are looking for a great treasure just now. Have you, Madam — please, please tell us — have you in your flights ever seen anything of a ruby that glows like fire?"

"Flights," said the Stork, suspiciously. "I don't know what you mean by flights. I can tell you I'm not one of your flighty kind, not by any means. Of course, I have to bring the darlings to their new homes when called for, but I don't bother about rubies and such trash, I can tell you. Nasty things! the little dears might choke themselves or — did you say it glowed like fire? Goodness gracious!" went on the Stork in great agitation, "I hope you didn't bring any such stuff with you?"

"No," answered Hans, sadly enough, "we didn't. But please, Madam Stork, I don't see any babies. Where are they?"

"Where should they be but in bed?" answered the Stork in the same fussy way, but more pleasantly, for she had begun to notice the good manners of the children. "I just

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came up for a bit of an airing." She pointed her bill to an opening in the ground beneath her feet. "The nursery is down there," she said, "and I can't stay here talking much longer. I have three girls and four boys to bring to their new homes before night, and one is a Princess in her own right, let me tell you.

"But what was that you said about a ruby? The Gnome Queen's nursery is next door. I believe she lets her children play with such things." The Stork lowered her voice. "Nice enough babies, of course," she said, "but quite different from mine, you understand. You seem good, quiet children," the great bird went on. "Perhaps this will help you."

She stopped and pulled a shining feather from her breast. "My compliments to the Gnome Queen," she added, "and give her this. Now step lightly! There, go in behind that gray rock. Nobody will hurt you. Show the feather and ask for the Queen. I hear my darlings calling. Good-bye;" and in an instant the Stork had disappeared.

With hearts beating high with hope, Hans

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and Gretel stepped to the opening that the Stork had pointed out. Sure enough, there it was, back of the gray moss-covered boulder. The children peered down into the hole. Not a ray of light was to be seen, and only a faint sound of hammering could now and again be dimly heard. The sunlight and the green grass looked doubly inviting now; but nothing venture, nothing have, and with the thought of the ruby to give them courage, they plunged boldly downward.

To their surprise, after a fall that shook them up a little but did not hurt them, their feet touched steps cut into the solid earth, and having descended these for some distance, they came at last to a long, winding passage, down which they groped their way. At the end a tiny glimmer of light danced and beckoned them onward. It grew brighter, and at last the children saw that it came from the tassel that bobbed about on the tip of a cap worn by the queerest little creature they had yet seen.

This small personage was almost as broad as he was long, with small twinkling eyes, little

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turned-up nose, and a huge mouth. He wore brown leggings, pointed shoes, and a red coat. To his leather belt hung a bunch of keys that jingled as he moved, and the children were able to see him quite plainly by reason of the tassel, which, as I have said, hung from the tip of his pointed cap and which glowed bright as living fire.

"I am the Keeper of the Passage-way," said this strange being in a small hard voice, that sounded like iron on steel. "Halt, earth children! By what right do you crave entrance?"

"By this feather," answered Hans; and he gave the Stork's message.

"Her Majesty, the Gnome Queen, is in the nursery," said the Keeper of the Passage-way. "Come with me."

Hans and Gretel obediently followed through many a gate which the Gnome unlocked and along a winding maze of narrow paths, all tunnelled deep beneath the earth. The children saw many strange sights as they passed: busy workers in arched chambers, hammering out yellow metal into curious shapes; jewels in

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carefully sorted heaps, guarded jealously by other Gnomes; and miners toiling hard and steadily. They did not linger, for their guide hurried them along; and at last, with a whispered word to the sentinel on duty, the nursery door was opened, and Hans and Gretel stepped across the threshold.

Here, after the darkness of the outer halls, the light was dazzling, while upon their wondering ears fell the deafening roars of a young Gnome, whom the Queen Mother was trying vainly to soothe.

Indeed her Majesty paid but little attention to the Keeper's explanation of the Earth children's errand, but motioned him impatiently away. Fortunately, at the sight of Hans and Gretel the young Gnome forgot his grievance and stared at the intruders.

It really was hard to keep from laughing, and only true politeness saved Hans and Gretel; for the small Gnome's mouth was stretched so wide, and his little bead-like eyes had so nearly disappeared.

“This is Prince Amethyst,” said the Queen

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Mother, straightening her crown as she spoke, for in the excitement it had fallen a little over one ear. "The dear child," she explained with pride, "has just found out that his brother's marbles are made of real diamonds, while his are only imitation. Of course he could n't stand that. No child of mine would. But think how clever of him to know the difference. He shall have some real ones right away."

"Handsome, is n't he?" continued the Queen Mother in a whisper. "I know that's what you're thinking; that lovely yellow complexion runs in our family. It comes from drinking molten gold. Yes, even as babies, my children will have nothing else. They tried liquid silver once with Prince Amethyst. They didn't do it twice, I can tell you. Now the Stork next door, if you'll believe it, gives her babies milk. Just common milk. Oh, well, you can tell it by their faces. Not a yellow skin among the lot."

"Please, your Majesty," began Hans, "the Stork said you might be able to tell us something about the Giant's ruby."

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The Gnome Queen looked at him sharply. "The Giant's ruby," she repeated in quite a different tone. "I made a poor bargain there: I sold it to the Fire Elves for only twice what I paid for it."

"Sold it!" cried both children in a breath.

"Yes," went on the Queen Mother. "Amethyst there *would* try to play with it, and burned his fingers badly. It's only in the Giant's ring that the ruby behaves properly. But it is such a beauty, I was tempted to buy it. Before the Fire Elves took it, we had trouble enough, I can tell you. They thought they could manage; but from all I hear, the ruby's acting worse than ever."

"Please, please tell us where the Fire Elves live?" asked Hans, hardly able to wait for the answer. "Is it far away?"

"Oh, not very," replied the Queen Mother carelessly. "You could get there if you knew how, in a couple of months, I dare say."

Gretel almost burst into tears at this, but Hans thought he saw in the Gnome Queen's

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face that she knew something more on the subject.

"Can you not tell us another way?" he pleaded.

"In our family," answered the Queen Mother shortly, "we don't give anything for nothing."

"But if we pay for it?" said Hans eagerly, pulling out the Giant's gold piece as he spoke.

The Gnome Queen's beady eyes glistened.

"That's another matter," she replied at once. "You may drop that into the Wishing Machine, and it will take you to the Fire Elves' Kingdom."

"And Gretel too?" asked Hans.

"Not without another gold piece," the Queen answered.

"Then," said Hans sadly, "I cannot go, either;" and he began to unbutton his jacket to put the money back again.

"Not so fast!" commanded the Queen. Her little eyes twinkled craftily. "Suppose you and your sister each go half-way. That will be to the Water Nymph's Kingdom. Here you,"

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she called to the sentinel, "take these earth children to the Wishing Machine, and see that they drop their gold piece in the right slot. Good-morning."

And Hans and Gretel found themselves hurried along to what seemed to be a small iron platform, up to which their new guide now led them. Above it stood a round metal pillar, in which were slits of different sizes. Obeying the Gnome's directions, the children stood on the platform and dropped their precious gold piece into an opening marked "W. N. K."

"Close your eyes and wish!" commanded he; and as they did so, "Whir-r-r whiz whir-r-r" went something above and around them, and in an instant the bewildered pair found themselves lying on the grass in the upper world once more, close beside a waterfall; and oh, joy! best of all, within a few feet of a thick clump of raspberry bushes laden with fruit. Here they made a good dinner, and then, being tired, fell fast asleep.

When Gretel awoke, the sun was setting. She sat up and rubbed her eyes. She was quite

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alone. Her brother was nowhere to be seen. The little girl sprang to her feet, and ran in every direction, calling "Hans! Hans!" but only the echo answered. At last, lonely, frightened, and tired, she sank down and began to cry bitterly.

"Why do you weep, maiden?" asked a musical voice that mingled with the splash of the waterfall.

Gretel looked up, and beheld through her tears a slender, beautiful figure, with flowing sea-green hair, deep gray eyes, and milk-white skin. A shimmering azure robe fell from the stranger's shoulders, bracelets of shell and coral were on her arms, her waist was girdled by a golden net, and her little feet were shod with silver sandals.

"I am the Nymph of the Waterfall," said she, and closing her hands into a cup, she eagerly caught the tears that fell down Gretel's rosy cheeks. "Look!" she cried in triumph. "Behold how each tear becomes a pearl. The Sea Queen herself could have no lovelier necklace. Give them to me, earth maiden, and I in return

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will bestow upon you my golden girdle ; ” and she unclasped it as she spoke.

“ I would rather have my brother , ” sobbed the little girl .

The Nymph laughed . “ Foolish child ! ” she said ; “ but take the girdle also , it may serve you well . As for your brother , I saw him not long since following Lustro the Water Kelpie . Since you must have him back , I will for once interfere and help you . ”

She clapped her hands , and on the instant a terrible snorting and splashing began in the rushes near at hand , and out leaped a little man covered from head to foot with scales , like a fish , and wearing a long gray beard in which seaweed and mosses were tangled . His fiery eyes were rolling in his head , and he was grinding two long teeth like tusks ; but Gretel hardly noticed this , for by one hand the Kelpie firmly held her brother .

Hans looked frightened , it is true , and his clothes were wet and dripping ; but his sister flung herself upon him , and sobbed , this time for very happiness .

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"The precious tears!" cried the Nymph in great excitement, catching as many as she could. "And so rare too. Tears of joy make much the most beautiful pearls. Run along, Kelpie! not a word! You can't have this boy; I've promised him to his sister. But stay! As you go, send hither my water-lily chariot and two sea-horses; I may need them;" and the angry little monster was forced to obey.

"Now," continued the Nymph, when Gretel had grown calmer, "I want these tears also, and I'll pay well for them. I know your errand and all about the Giant's ruby. Without my help you could never, never find it, and you must be both brave and fortunate to bring it back, even with my aid. It lies on the top of a brazen mountain in the Kingdom of the Fire Elves. My sea-horses will bear you safe as far as the river that flows on its outskirts.

"Once there, think of the Witch's saying:

'The ruby's fire mounting higher
Will show the two what they must do.'

Here, Gretel, is my girdle. Hold it fast, and remember no flame can melt or harm it. You,

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Hans, must help your sister." She stooped and whispered in his ear. "Magic words," she said, "but be careful; don't say them till the time comes. Ah! here is my chariot. Jump in!" and with a wave of her hand the kind Water Nymph cut short the children's thanks and bade them good-bye.

Hans told Gretel all about his narrow escape, and the fine promises about the ruby that had made him follow the wicked Kelpie. It was very pleasant speeding over the smooth water, and they had no use for the bulrush whip, the sea-horses went so swiftly. By this time night had fallen, and by daybreak they were in a new country.

The Water Nymph had, fortunately, thought of everything; there was food and to spare in a basket of rushes in the chariot, and when the sea-horses stopped to munch the tender marsh grasses, the children made a hearty meal.

But now everything began to change. The sky was no longer blue overhead, but a kind of dull reddish-yellow; the river grew narrow; no more green and smiling country was to be

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seen, but instead, desert waste and hot sandy soil. At length the sea-horses stopped and refused to go farther. Hans and Gretel, therefore, stepped out, not forgetting to take their lunch-basket with them. Hearing a strange noise, they crouched down in the bushes by the side of the stream, while the sea-horses reared, plunged, and turning, galloped toward home, churning the water to foam with their hoofs as they sped onward.

"The Fire Elves!" whispered Hans, as two figures in shining brazen armor passed near by,—the flame from their mouths and nostrils crisp-ing the herbage about them as they walked. Gretel heard them say, "The Giant's ruby," and pressed her brother's hand tight in her excitement, as both children listened.

It seemed, from the way the Fire Elves were talking, that the King of their country had been so delighted with the wonderful jewel that he had bought it at a great price from the Gnome Queen, who had purchased it in turn from the thief who had stolen it. The ruby's fire had been troublesome in the Gnomes' under-world,

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and the Queen had hastened to find a customer. She had craftily spoken to the Fire King of the marvellous beacon the ruby's flame would be, and he had fallen into the trap, and placed the gem on the very summit of a great brass mountain that had been built for it in his dominions.

Now, at home, in the giant's ring the magic stone glowed with but gentle warmth and radiance, but here the spell that bound its fires was loosed, and the flames from its glowing heart grew daily fiercer, nor could they, by any means known to the Elves, be quenched. The heat from the blazing jewel troubled them also, though none dared now ascend the brazen mountain, for the fire was unlike any other, and if the King complained, you may be sure there was no lack of grumbling from even his most humble subjects. The nights, too, were now as bright as day, for the new beacon lit up the whole surrounding country; and this was very troublesome. Nobody dared to get the ruby, even had one been found brave enough to journey with it to the dread Giant's Castle.

Thus talking, the Fire Elves passed on, and

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even as they did so, the sky was lit for miles around, and from the summit of the brazen mountain in the distance blood-red flames shot up. The children gazed in mingled fear and wonder, and as they looked upon this wondrous sight, the same thought came to both. The Witch's saying! For surely the flames were curiously shaped—great scarlet letters against the sky.

“The ruby's fire mounting higher
Will show the two what they must do.”

“Come,” cried Hans, rising to his feet and pulling his sister along. “The ruby calls us;” and without another word they ran straight in the direction of the brazen mountain.

As they approached, the Fire Elves, amazed at the strange sight of earth children in such a place, drew back to let them pass, and luckily held their breaths in wonder. But now the air grew hot, and the very ground was burned and black beneath their feet. The ruby, though so far away, gave out great blasts of heat as from a furnace. It was clearly impossible to go on further in this manner.

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Hans stopped, and to Gretel's surprise waved his hand in the air three times, repeating, as he did so, the charm which the Water Nymph had whispered, —

“Come, veil of mist, and shield us well
From ruby's flame and magic spell.
These words I say, — Air Sprites, obey !”

And hardly had he done so when a cool veil of gray mist wrapped both the children as in a garment, the terrible heat disappeared, and the flames fell back from them as they hastened onward.

It was, however, a hard climb up the slippery steps cut in the side of the brass mountain, though with every step they saw more clearly the crimson glow at the summit, and knew that there at last would be found the Giant's ruby, — the jewel that was to make them happy, rich, and free.

One more brave effort and the weary children were looking straight into its glowing depths. But now Hans was at a loss, and so was Gretel. How should they carry the wonderful gem? The mist still sheltered them, but no mortal

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hand could bear the jewel from its resting-place.

So near to victory and now so far away ! Hans was in despair, and with tear-dimmed eyes Gretel looked longingly at the ruby. What was that ? Surely the flames were spelling a message to her now ! In an instant she grasped its meaning.

The Nymph's girdle ! How stupid of her not to have remembered that fire could not harm it ! With trembling fingers the little girl unclasped the golden net, and in another instant the thing was done. There, safe within its gleaming meshes, lay, with now but a smouldering fire in its glowing heart, the precious object of their toil and journeyings, the Giant's ruby.

Hans and Gretel never knew how they came down the brazen mountain. As in a dream, they saw the Fire Elves crowded about them in their sheltering veil of mist, and heard the thanks of their grateful King. At his command a boat was soon made ready and launched upon the river, the silken sails set, and the brother and sister invited to come aboard.

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To Hans the Fire King gave in parting a small brown-covered, iron-bound book, and to Gretel a pretty housewife with thimble, scissors, and needles all complete. Then the boat started, and soon a turn in the river hid the barren Fire Country from sight. At the same time the veil of mist melted away, and the tired children fell asleep.

In their dreams it seemed as though the Water Nymph bent over them and kissed their closed eyelids, and again the white Stork bore them swift and sure, as one of her own babies, far, far above the green earth, onward and homeward. How much was true and how much had happened in dreamland only, Hans and Gretel would have found hard to say; but it is at least certain that the next thing the children knew, boat and river had alike disappeared, and they found themselves once more on the outskirts of the mighty forest that surrounded the Giant's Castle.

Gretel looked fearfully into her golden net, but heaved a sigh of relief, for the ruby blinked its fiery eye at her in safety. Hans, too, had



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his book, and the housewife was not missing. They had hardly taken stock of all these treasures when, without a sound, the great Owl who had first carried them on their journey alighted at their feet. "Time's up!" said he, and then the children knew that the Fire Elves' Country must, indeed, lie far away.

It was nightfall again when they reached the Giant's Castle, but with what a different feeling in their hearts!

The Giant, fierce and grim, strode out to meet them; but his quick eye caught the ruby's glow before the wanderers could speak. In a trice it was clapped back into its setting in the ring; and, having done this, quite a different expression came over the Giant's rugged features.

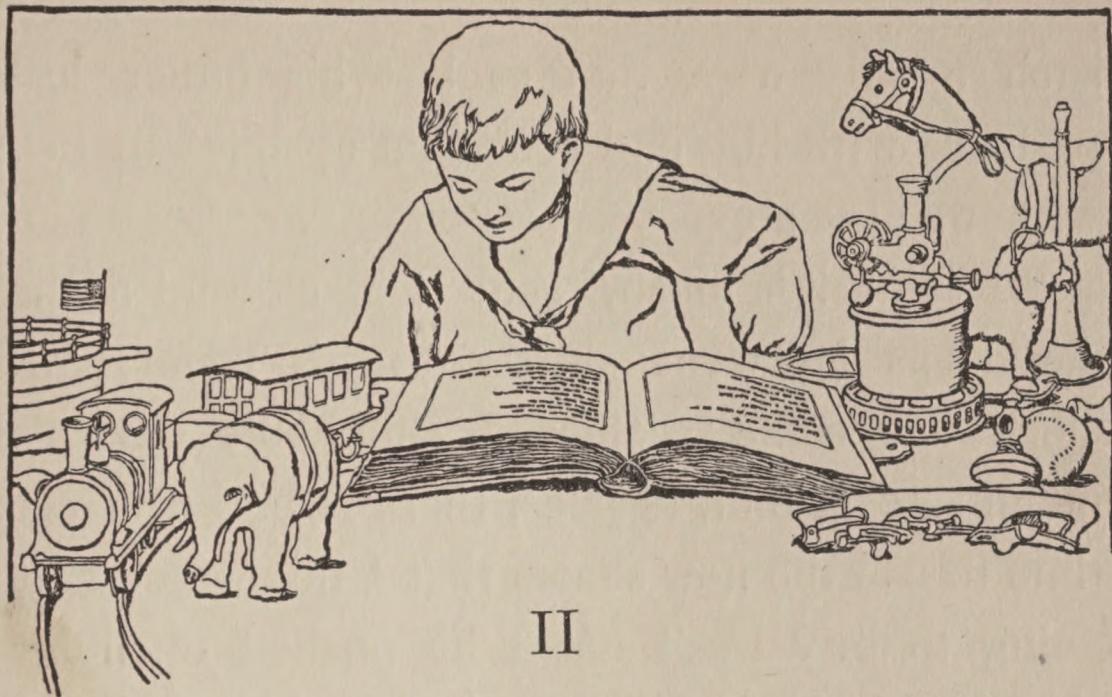
"Well, well, well!" he said, smiling. "So you two mites have done what even I could not accomplish? You," he said to Hans, "shall be Mayor of yonder village;" and he waved his hand in the direction of the children's home. "And you," he continued, turning to Gretel, "shall live with your brother and help him to rule his people; while my share of the bargain

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shall be all the gold that you two can carry ; " and thus it was.

Between fear of the Giant, joy at their own children's new-found safety, and wonder at the riches that Hans and Gretel brought with them, the villagers were quite agreed that all should be according to the Giant's ordering. Nor did the worthy townsfolk ever regret their choice,—for Hans daily culled from the leaves of the Fire Elf King's book such wisdom as befitted a ruler; and as for Gretel, with the magic aid of the housewife, she soon became Head Dressmaker of the village, and yearly set the fashion,—not one, not even the former Mayoress, daring in this matter to dispute her slightest word.

The ruby's Master went at once on a long journey, and, so far as I know, never came back. The path in the forest gradually closed up for lack of travel; and, should you care to know if the Castle be yet standing, you must ask the Giant's Owl to tell you.



II

WHEN CHRISTMAS CAME TOO EARLY

BEN was a boy who always wanted things just a little different from the way they were. If his mother gave him jam for dessert, he would be apt to complain because it had n't been pie, and when his uncle William presented him with a fine new bicycle, Ben, I am sorry to tell you, began almost at once to say that he wished his wheel had been painted red instead of blue.

So, of course, you will not be surprised when I add that Ben found a great deal of fault because Christmas did not come earlier. In fact, he grumbled so much about it, and talked in

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such a silly way, that at last his father lost patience with him and sent him upstairs to bed without any supper.

"I think it's mean," said Ben, as loud as he dared, as he went slowly to his room; "if Christmas came sooner, I should n't have so much school, and, besides, there'd be lots more time to use the new skates that I think mother's going to buy me." And he pushed open his chamber door. "I just wish *I* could fix things once," he added.

"Do you?" asked a shrill little voice that made Ben jump, and he looked about the room in amazement. Everything seemed as usual. His white iron bed with the coverlid neatly turned back, his dressing-gown folded and lying on the chair, his fishing-rod in its place in the corner, the window— But what was that on the window? Ben did n't quite know whether to go forward and look, or run downstairs; and before he had made up his mind, the shrill little voice sounded again, —

"Don't be afraid. I'm a friend of yours, and I think just as you do about Christmas. It

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certainly ought to be earlier, and I'll help you to make it so, if you like."

Ben could hardly believe his ears. To begin with, people didn't generally agree with him. His mother usually said, "Oh, do run along, you foolish boy!" and his father was very apt to cut short any argument with, "Not another word, my son." It was very pleasant to hear that his idea of the matter had been right, and besides the voice came from such a small figure perched on the window ledge; anything so tiny could hardly do him any harm. And if this queer little object really could help him, what fun it would be; and people would find out that some boys knew a great deal more than some grown people.

So, thinking of all these things, Ben came a step or two nearer, and took a better look at his strange visitor.

A queer little person he surely was: not over a foot high, with a brown skin, twinkling brown eyes, and a small, turned-up nose. He was dressed in nut-brown doublet and hose, with cap and shoes of the same color; so when he

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said abruptly, in answer to the boy's questioning look, "I'm a Brownie," the name seemed just what it should be.

"Do you live far from here?" asked Ben politely.

"Here and there and everywhere," answered the small creature airily. "I like fun, and I go where I wish to get it. I've just come this morning from the North Pole, and if you mean what you say, you shall go back with me there to-night."

At this Ben's eyes and mouth opened wide with astonishment.

"Oh, you need n't be so surprised," said the Brownie; "I can do my part all right, if you'll stick to yours. And you need n't worry about your family, either, for I'll leave an imitation boy in your place, and they'll never know the difference. He'll be hollow inside, but your mother said the other day at breakfast that she thought *you* must be, and he'll grumble at most things, about the way you do; and when you come back he'll vanish, and you can step right into his place."

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"Well," said Ben, "it sounds pretty good. How do we go?"

"Right straight through without changes, by the new Brownie System. You hold my hand and shut your eyes; I say the word, and there you are."

"But I'd rather go a different way," began Ben; but the Brownie interrupted crossly,—

"That sort of talk may do at home, but it won't do with me. If you want Christmas changed, you've got to see Santa Claus; and if you want him, you've got to go to the North Pole; and if you go to the North Pole, it's got to be my way. Take it or leave it; and be quick too. I can't sit on this window-ledge all night."

"I'll take it," cried Ben hurriedly, for he thought it would never do to miss a chance like this; and besides, how envious all the boys at school would be when he told them of his adventures!

"Right you are," said the Brownie heartily. "Here's my hand. Hold tight now. Shut your eyes. 'Rumpletibubble — kinfinysco — Hiohi — open your eye! Presto Change!'"

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It sounded to Ben like the Home College cheer. He hadn't moved, of course. It was all a joke of the Brownie's, but he opened his eyes obediently, however, and then closed them quickly, only to open them once more. Could he be dreaming? His room had vanished, the very village about it had disappeared. He was standing at the beginning of a long avenue of evergreens, each one hung with tiny candles, gold and silver balls, and horns of plenty.

"Why, they're Christmas trees," he said suddenly.

"Of course," answered the Brownie, who was still by his side; "what else did you expect? And that house in the distance, at the end of the driveway, is Santa Claus' residence. Now look here; I'm not going in there, because just now we've had a little disagreement. But by and by he'll come out to feed the reindeer for the night, and then you slip in and hide behind something. There's a big calendar in the work-room, and he goes by that. So when he's not looking, you pull off as many leaves as you like, and it will bring Christmas that many days

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nearer. When he starts Christmas Eve to deliver goods, you can get in the back of the sleigh, and so home again. Good-bye, I've got to go now ; " and before the boy could speak the Brownie had vanished.

It was certainly all a very strange proceeding, and Ben felt very lonesome and just a trifle frightened in the great silence that followed the Brownie's chatter. Above, the glittering stars shone cold and bright, and about him on every side stretched, mile upon mile, the snow ; no house save one ; no hills ; no trees but those before him ; no fences ; nothing like home ; only the snow,—for ever and ever the untrod-den, pathless snow.

The most friendly thing in the whole landscape was a beam of light that came from the uncurtained window of the house at the end of the long double row of Christmas trees, and toward this Ben slowly made his way. He had hardly reached the shelter of the porch when the door opened and a merry round face looked out ; then, bearing a lighted lantern in one hand, Santa Claus himself crossed the

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threshold. Of course Ben knew him at once, as he would have known him anywhere, though he had never seen him except in pictures. He was short and fat and rosy, with a long white beard, a fur-trimmed suit and cap, and great high boots for walking through the snow.

As he passed Ben, never seeing him, he began to talk in a jolly kind of voice: "Let's see, let's see. There's Donner and Blitzen to be fed with the special sea-moss, and Cupid's off shoulder must be rubbed well with liniment. All the reindeer must be in good condition, for there's plenty of work ahead. Plenty of work, and that's what I like and they like too;" and with a quiet chuckle Santa Claus disappeared around the corner of the house, while Ben crept quietly within.

To be in such a house in such a way! It was enough to turn a boy's head; and Ben didn't stop to think how much pleasanter it would be to walk up boldly and ask, like a man, for shelter, and enter as a guest, than thus to sneak in like a thief when Santa Claus' back was turned. I would like to be able to

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say that Ben felt ashamed; but the truth is, he did n't stop to think of anything of the kind, so curious was he to see this wonderful place and the treasures it contained.

Having stepped across the threshold, the boy found himself in a great low-ceilinged room, bright and cheery and warm. Across the centre of the apartment ran a long work-table, with many kinds of tools upon it ready for use. Ben also saw lying there a pipe, and a big brass-bound book, which happened to be open, and which evidently contained the names of children, something about each one, where they lived, and what they were to receive on Christmas Day. The boy turned back to the front pages and soon found his own name. He had just read "Benjamin Bean: short, strong, light hair, pug nose, blue eyes, freckles. First cottage to the left on Pine Street. Likes to grumble—" when Santa Claus' returning steps sounded without, and he jumped back so quickly, to escape being seen, that he accidentally hit a flaxen-haired young lady doll in the chest, and she said, "Ma! ma!" so loudly that the boy

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turned cold with fright. However, Santa Claus did not hear her, but stopped to turn the big key in the front door, and Ben had time to crouch behind a big pile of newly made drums, and so near some freshly painted jumping-jacks that it was all he could do to keep from sneezing.

To his great relief, however, Santa Claus did not seem disposed to work any longer that evening; for after glancing about to see that all was in order, and carefully knocking the ashes from his pipe, he slowly climbed up a ladder that led to a loft overhead and so through a trap-door, which he shut carefully after him.

Ben could hardly believe his good fortune. He waited for a few moments to make sure that it was safe to come out, and then he crept quietly forth.

Such heaps and heaps of toys! What should he look at first? But before he decided, he would make sure of the thing he had come so far to do, and going to the big calendar that hung on one side of the wall, he began to tear off the pages with a reckless hand, stopping only at December twenty-third.

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Then such a night as followed! No boy could be sleepy in a room like that, and Ben was wide enough awake, I can tell you. He ran a beautifully made engine up and down a line of tracks and in and out of the engine house, till he was tired; then a full-rigged ship caught his eye; and a marvellous game with marbles; and mounted horsemen who rang tiny bells as they leaped little fences kept him busy for quite an hour. I cannot, in fact, begin to tell you all that Ben found by turns interesting and amusing.

There were many things there, of course, that, being a boy, he passed by without a second glance,—things that would have made a little girl wild with delight: dolls that talked and walked and danced, baby dolls, queen dolls, nurses, Red-Riding-Hoods, and so on with amazing and delightful variety; doll houses completely furnished; toy cook-stoves with pots, pans, and kettles; necklaces; rings; bracelets; and, of course, a great variety of toys for both girls and boys of younger growth,—Noah's Arks; animals that squeaked and growled; fishes

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that floated ; trumpets ; roly-polys ; rattles ;— it was enough to make your head swim.

Ben saw just the kind of football his soul yearned for, and a bicycle superior to any in the village ; and there were kites of curious forms, and self-cocking air-guns and other guns of different styles, so that he felt very much like the donkey between two bales of hay, and asked himself a dozen times which should he take first.

But even a night like this must have an end, and Santa Claus is an early riser. The morning light began to stream into the uncurtained windows, and Ben reluctantly took off the policeman's helmet which he had just donned, and carefully avoiding the young lady who said "Ma! ma!" sought his hiding-place, having first provided himself with a generous slice of bread and cheese which he had found with other eatables in a corner cupboard. And none too soon, for at that very moment the trap-door above opened, and Santa Claus' ruddy face looked through. Another instant, and the Children's Saint was descending the ladder.

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Ben had been careful to replace the toys as nearly as possible in the order he had found them, and Santa Claus evidently saw nothing wrong, for after a hasty glance he stepped over to the calendar. Here he stood stock still, and a puzzled, worried look overspread his usually merry countenance. Ben watched him closely, hardly daring to breathe; and he saw Santa Claus take a pair of iron-bowed spectacles from a shelf, wipe the glasses carefully, and again look at the calendar.

"Bless my soul!" he said at length. "How could I have made such a mistake? Nineteen hundred Christmases, and never the like before! I've missed a whole month somehow, and here, instead of the twenty-third of November, it's December twenty-third. Bless my soul, bless my soul, whatever shall I do?" And the dear old Saint looked so disturbed and saddened that Ben's graceless heart gave a throb of sympathy, and its owner even began to be a little ashamed of the part he had taken.

"Well, well," went on Santa Claus briskly, "no good loitering here. I've got to do my

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best, that's all, and the reindeer will have to do their best. To-morrow I'll pull that rope that sets the Christmas bells ringing for Christmas Eve, and I'll have to pack up as usual, and do all I can not to disappoint the children."

So saying, the good old Saint trudged out into the snow to feed his reindeer; and Ben, watching his chance, snatched a hasty store of provisions for the day from the cupboard, and a bottle of water with which to quench his thirst.

In a few moments back came Santa Claus, and then began such a scene as the waiting boy had never before beheld. Hardly pausing for breath, Santa Claus worked at his toys, hammering, painting, pasting; and at last Ben, worn out after his journey and his night's excitement, curled up and went to sleep. But there was no sleep for Santa Claus. All night long he toiled, and the dawn of the supposed twenty-fourth found him busily packing up for his annual journey.

The green paint came off a monkey he was putting in, and stuck all over a woolly lamb.

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The paste hadn't had time to harden on the last lot of paper dolls, so that parts of their pretty tissue-paper dresses got rubbed off. In his haste Santa Claus strapped several wrong sizes of skates together, such as a No. 3 for one foot with a No. 5 for the other; and on consulting his list, he found, when it was too late to change things, that it was Tommy Jones that wanted the accordion, and not Sammy Smith, as he had thought. In another family Aunt Maria got a tool chest intended for her nephew, and he got a fine new pair of gold-bowed spectacles. Certainly some things did get mixed, but it was pretty hard for one pair of hands to do in two days' time the work of a whole month, and even Santa Claus could not fix everything just as it should be. It was very sad, as it was, to see the dear old Saint try to make the toys go round; for of course there were some orders unfilled, and it nearly broke his heart to think of the thin stockings and sparingly hung Christmas trees that must needs be the following morning. "If there's any one thing that I like better than another, it's a good fat stocking," he murmured,

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as he flung the last lot of Christmas gifts into his pack and turned to go out.

Ben got up and followed silently, keeping as much in the shadow as possible, and was able to slip into the sleigh and conceal himself under the big fur robe without Santa Claus knowing anything about it. The night was clear and cold, the reindeer stamped their feet impatient to be gone, and the bells on the harness jingled as they moved. Santa Claus put the pack carefully into the sleigh, and then jumped in himself. One crack of the whip, and away they sped down the long avenue of evergreens, and straight on across the untrodden waste of snow.

To go back to every-day life and people: you can fancy for yourself the wonder felt by all when on what was supposed to be the twenty-fourth of November the Christmas bells began to ring. Of course, nobody thought for a moment that Santa Claus had made a mistake: that seemed clearly impossible, and in all the towns and throughout the country-side the people simply hurried and scurried, and

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racked their brains, and tried to make the best of things and get ready, all in a moment as it were, for Christmas.

Ben would have been sorely disappointed at the success of his venture had he heard what people said, and how much disappointment instead of pleasure his thoughtless act had caused. He was to know soon enough, as you shall hear, but just now I want you to learn something of the distress and confusion that at once beset the land. It reached all classes of people, from the King, who was planning to give the Queen a surprise in the shape of a new crown, to little Sally in her garret chamber, patiently trying to finish a new pair of reins for her small brother.

Nobody had their gifts in readiness, — that is, but few did, — and even the cooks hadn't their mince-pies baked and their turkeys stuffed ; nobody's house was hung with holiday wreaths, and none of the candy-shops had those fascinating barley animals or other sweet stuff that comes expressly for this one great feast of the year. The small boys were particularly angry, be-

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cause they had lost Thanksgiving Day, and people went about with careworn and even cross faces, instead of the usual jolly Christmas Eve expression.

Christmas Day itself was hardly better. Santa Claus had done his best, as we know; but when he listened down the chimney early in the morning, as was his invariable habit, he heard as many words of disappointment as he did cries of pleasure. Some small people even sobbed aloud,—for what little girl wants a jack-knife, and what boy of thirteen a woolly lamb that baas? Luckily Santa Claus' hair was white already, or all this trouble would have turned it so.

And what about Ben all this while? Still smuggled under the great fur robe in the sleigh, he peeped out without being seen, as after each second trip to the housetops Santa Claus' face grew sadder and sadder, until at last, when the dear old Saint began to talk to himself about the matter, and blame himself severely for losing a whole month by sheer carelessness and absence of mind,—for so he put it,—the boy could stand

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it no longer. With trembling fingers he threw aside the robe, and hardly noticing Santa Claus' start of surprise, he plunged into the truthful recital of all that he had done, and never stopped till the whole story was out.

As he talked, the rosy face of his hearer grew grave, but it was evident too that Ben's manly confession of his naughtiness had not been lost on one who is ever the children's friend.

"Never has mortal boy before so much as seen my sleigh or the tip of a single reindeer's horn," said Santa Claus, after a moment's pause, when Ben at last had told his tale; "and think now what trouble and sorrow you have brought to trusting hearts all over this wide earth, and how many little hands are empty through your fault. But you are sorry for your act, and you shall have a chance to make amends. The trouble you have caused me I forgive freely, but it is not mine to forgive you for spoiling the children's pleasure and the happiness of all who love Christmas. You must go to-night to the Snow Queen, and she shall decide your punishment. If you do her bidding

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well, on the real Christmas Eve, a month from hence, I will myself bring you back to your home, and leave you there a happy boy.

"As for these poor people so sadly cheated of their joy, I will, after you have gone to the Snow Queen, sprinkle about in each household a magic powder, so that some shall never remember what has just happened, and those that do will think it all a dream. I will collect the toys and the other gifts I have just left, and the real Christmas on the right day will be, I hope, as bright and beautiful and glad as any I have ever seen.

"As for the Brownie who led you into all this trouble, he must pay the penalty. He shall go to prison for a year,—a Jack-in-the-box he shall be,—and I hope the chance to be silent and to think will make him less ready for mischief." So saying, Santa Claus again turned his reindeer's heads to the North, and at the word of command they sped homeward.

Ben did not know what lay before him, but in spite of his fears his heart was lighter than it had been on the journey down, for he felt that at last

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he had done the right thing, and that Santa Claus would not let the Snow Queen give him any task above his strength.

After leaving the thickly settled districts and on through outlying hamlets, the reindeer took that wonderful pace that is at once so even and so swift, and which enables their master to visit all those thousands of firesides before cock-crow every Christmas morn ; but when they reached the avenue of evergreens that led to Santa Claus' home, they did not slacken their speed, for they had still some miles to go toward the frozen North, where the wonderful palace of the Snow Queen was standing.

Ben could now see its frosty towers and sparkling roof in the distance, and at last tall gates of ice barred their way. The sleigh stopped. Ben had hardly time to gaze upon the curious forms of men, animals, and flowers that decorated the massive structure, when sentinels clad in dazzling armor swung wide the fretted doors, and bowing low, received the command with which Santa Claus gave up his captive to their keeping. Without a word

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Ben too was clad from head to foot in a shining snow-white suit, for without such protection he would have perished, slain by the first icy breath from the Snow Queen's domain.

Santa Claus bade him farewell, the reindeer started, and after one wistful glance, Ben followed his silent guards through the gates, and they closed heavily behind him.

Under a long line of frozen arches, hung with lamps in which a blue light burned, the boy was led, and so on and on, up the great ice stairs of the Palace, through silent white halls, and at last into the presence of the Queen.

The royal lady was clad in dazzling white, and the gaze of her cold blue eyes seemed to pierce Ben through and through. He saw, as if in a dream, her glittering diamond crown; the snowy veil that covered her hair, dark as a storm cloud; the wonderful throne of carved ice upon which she sat; the columns covered with beautiful and strange frost tracery, that held up the ceiling of the great Hall; the motionless rows of maids and men-at-arms: all, all in white like their dread mistress.

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Then the Snow Queen spoke, and her voice made him think of falling icicles, and of the miles and miles of frozen, barren country over which he had just come. It made his very blood, too, run chill and slow in his veins ; and it was with a sigh of relief that he obeyed the silent wave of her hand, commanding him to follow the waiting guard, and so to his first task.

This time the scene changed. The country all about was still cold and bound with the iron grip of never-ending Winter ; but at a little distance the boy saw a snow hut, with openings for doors and windows, and much like the huts Ben used to build at home, only many times larger.

“Here,” said the guide, speaking for the first time, “here is the home of the Great-Grandmother of the Polar Bears. You must obey her as you would the Snow Queen herself. On your faithfulness much depends.”

They reached, as he spoke, the door of the hut. “My Sovereign sends this boy,” he said through the opening, pushing Ben within as he spoke. “His life is under the royal pro-

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tection, but his services are yours to do with as you wish. When the moon changes, I will call for him and bear to my mistress the report of his conduct."

From the glare without to the half darkness within was such a change that for a moment Ben could see little but a tumbling mass of white that rolled about on the floor of the hut. His ears, however, were greeted instantly with a sharp chorus of yelps and growls, and he shrank back, not knowing what was to come next. But a gruff voice bade him draw nearer, and he was now able to see that the squirming thing at his feet was really three or four little Bears, rolling over and over, and biting and cuffing one another, half in frolic and half in anger. The yelps and growls came from them, but the big voice of command proceeded from an immense yellow-white She-Bear, who reclined on a block of ice at one side of the hut.

And now began such a life as Ben had never even faintly imagined. He was, to all intents and purposes, to play nurse to four quarrelsome young Bears, and to please as best he

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could their cross old Great-Grandmother, who, in her way, was even harder to suit than the youngsters.

“Bluff,” the eldest of the three brothers, was fond of being pushed about on a cake of ice on the unfrozen water near the hut, and it was lucky Ben was a strong boy for his age, for it was no light task, shoving around a young Bear of this size, as I can tell you.

“Tough,” the second brother, was always fighting, and had to be continually pulled out of trouble by the tip of his tail; and this, too, was no easy matter.

“Squealeow,” their baby sister, was forever whining, no matter how hard Ben tried to please her; and perhaps, after all, she was the one who had most to do with changing the boy for the better, for Ben soon got so sick and tired of hearing her grumble that he made up his mind never again to do the same himself.

There remained but one other little Bear, and he was called “Grip;” and a good name it was for him, for he was so selfish that he always managed to get the largest piece of blubber at

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meals, and was always trying to turn his brothers and sisters out of the coldest corner at night.

As for the Great-Grandmother, she was very particular about her coat, and the thing that Ben disliked most of all was to stand by the hour and comb out the snarls that would get, for all his pains, in her long yellow-white fur.

He learned a number of things here, however, that were amazingly useful afterward. For one thing, to mind when he was first spoken to ; and for another, not to answer back ; for the old She-Bear was as ready with her paw as with her tongue, and Ben was often knocked off his feet, end over end, head first into the snow. It didn't hurt particularly, but it was very disagreeable, and he soon found that the Great-Grandmother of the Bears was far more likely to keep *her* temper when he succeeded in keeping *his* ; and after that things went more smoothly.

He was not sorry, however, when the moon changed, and the guard, having received a pretty good report of his conduct, led him once more into the presence of the Snow Queen.

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This time his task was to bring a perfect diamond necklace to his royal mistress, and he was told how to do so, led to the proper place, and there left alone.

"On Christmas Eve I will seek you here," said the guard, "and if your task is finished, you will be set without the gates and free once more. Should you fail, another year awaits you within the Snow Queen's Kingdom."

Ben now found himself in the royal garden, and the sight that met his eyes was more strange and beautiful than anything he had yet seen. Everything here, as elsewhere, was white, but with a soft, shimmering whiteness, quite unlike the cold, steely glitter of the Palace.

Out of the pure snow that lined the garden walk grew countless beautiful flowers: stately lilies and white roses; and in one special bed, a clump of priceless edelweiss. It was these blossoms that he was to watch with patience, for at midnight a single drop of dew would fall into the flower's heart; at that instant the Northern Lights would flash, and their shimmering glory be imprisoned within the drop of dew.

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Then it was Ben's task to pluck the flower, and if he did so at the right moment, the drop in its centre would harden and turn into a perfect diamond. This would happen for twelve nights, and Ben knew he must be constant and not fail to tend all the Queen's flowers carefully, especially the edelweiss, so that the white blossoms would stand upright on their stems and not droop from lack of care.

Great birds with snowy plumage preened their feathers on the ice-bound branches of the trees in the garden, and butterflies with silvery wings floated from flower to flower; and when night came, the moon rose high in the heavens, and the stars blazed with a glory unknown to other climes.

In its way, this work was as hard as the other, for here the silence was unbroken, and for all its loveliness Ben found the garden very, very lonely. He was tired, too, though not hungry, for in the Snow Queen's Kingdom people rarely need to eat; but Ben did want to sleep, and yet he dared not, at least until every task was done and the midnight hour had

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struck, when the weary lad would pillow his head upon the snow and snatch a few hours' longed-for rest.

Eleven nights had come and gone, and eleven perfect diamonds had crowned his work. But one more was needed, and then home! How his heart ached at the word; how much he wanted his mother's arms, and how he wished for his father's voice and the merry voices of his brothers and sister! And his little white bed — I'm afraid it was thinking of that which made poor Ben's eyes so strangely heavy. At any rate, the silver chimes in the royal tower pealed once and again without the gardener's knowledge. Ten o'clock, eleven o'clock — Ben heard them not, for he was fast asleep. Swift and sure came the midnight hour. "One! two! three! four!" pealed the bells, and the Northern Lights flashed in the heavens. "Five! six! seven! eight!" One bright ray struck sharp on the boy's closed eyelids. "Nine! ten!" Ben opened his bewildered eyes and sat up. "Eleven! twelve!" — but at the last stroke his hand closed as by instinct over the last

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unplucked edelweiss, and the twelfth diamond rolled upon the ground at his feet.

At the same moment the voice of the guard rang in his ears : "Twelve perfect stones ! Well done. I bring the Queen's dismissal. You are free ;" and Ben found himself hurried along through a maze of walks, out under the arches of the entrance, and so through the great carved gates of ice, which slowly closed behind him, the man-at-arms having taken from him the suit that he had worn on first entering those same portals.

He was alone, quite alone, with the Snow Queen's Kingdom at his back, and before him hundreds of miles of ice-bound country. His heart sank. Had Santa Claus forgotten him ? Was he to be left to perish thus, just as he had earned forgiveness for his fault ?

But now, as if in answer to the thought, a tiny mouse-like train appeared in the distance, and the faint sound of bells was borne upon the air. Swiftly the sleigh approached, and in a brief space Santa Claus had caught the shivering boy in his arms, had tucked him well up under the big fur robe, and saying, "I go to-

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night, my brave Ben, to your home first," had turned the willing reindeer in that direction.

Again the boy's lids were heavy, and now there was naught for which he must waken. He felt safe and warm and happy, and the sleigh-bells kept saying in a delightful jingle, "Home again, home again," and by and by, "Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas."

He opened his eyes and rubbed them.

"Well, of all the sleepy boys!" said his mother's voice; and there he was, safe and sound in his little white bed, while about him danced his brothers and sister, each with a fat stocking clasped tight in their hands; while his father in dressing-gown and slippers, and rather sleepy though still smiling, stood pointing to a similar stocking that hung from the fireplace opposite.

After that it did not take Ben long to wake up. And the list of treasures that were waiting for him was almost as surprising as the adventures through which he had just passed; and the grateful joy with which he received them,

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without one single word of fault-finding, was more wonderful yet to his father and mother, who, of course, did not know about all these strange happenings.

A little later Ben counted his gifts once more,—the promised skates from his mother; a double-runner with “The Crimson Flyer” on it, from his father; a purple worsted muffler from Aunt Maria, who believed only in presents that were useful; a double-barrelled rifle from Uncle Will, who didn’t mind danger if only the children were happy; a box of home-made taffy from Sister Mary; a bank and a book from his two brothers.

Yes; and what was that at the very toe of his stocking? Ben held it up to the wondering eyes of his family: a jack-knife,—the most complete thing of its kind, with two blades, a corkscrew, a pair of scissors, and a gimlet, and attached to it a piece of paper, on which was written—

“With the Compliments of Santa Claus.”

“A joke of Uncle Will’s,” said his father, laughing; but Ben knew better.



III

THE PRINCE OF THE SILVER SHIELD

ONCE upon a time there lived a King who had an only son named Rolf, and surnamed Strong-Arm, so skilled was he in every manly sport. To a youth of this temper, Court life seemed very dull. His royal father was an old, old man, and so long as the Head Cook put the right amount of salt in his porridge, and no roistering pages disturbed with their gambols the Palace quiet at nap-time, the aged monarch was perfectly satisfied. Not so Prince Strong-Arm. He eagerly listened to all the tales of danger and adventure

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that the Story-Teller-in-Ordinary could relate, and he longed with all his heart for something more exciting than a gallop on the plains, surrounded by a watchful body-guard, or a tournament in the Palace courtyard, where politeness and respect for royalty made each opponent yield all too readily the palm of victory.

At last he became so impatient, and begged his father so hard for permission to set forth on his travels, that the old King, quite worn out by his repeated requests, granted him at last the wished-for leave of absence, making, however, one condition. This was that Rolf would take with him the Silver Shield that hung in the royal armory, and which was accounted so great a treasure that a soldier with drawn sword was stationed day and night before it. A fairy of importance had given it many years before to the grandfather of the present monarch; it was therefore a magic Shield, and its usefulness was this: kept bright and shining like a mirror, it would, at the owner's command, faithfully reflect the face of friend and foe. If

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a traitor to the King should be forced to gaze into its depths, his villainy would at once be plainly seen mirrored in the shining surface of the Silver Shield. If a beautiful but wicked woman looked therein, her loveliness would not be reflected, as in an ordinary glass, but an old hag would stare back at her, mocking her rage at the unexpected sight. On the other hand, a beggar hunchback, with a clean and loving heart, would appear like a handsome Prince. In a word, it showed people just as they really were. Of course, to make the Shield do this it was necessary to keep it spotless and bright, as I have said, and the owner also had to repeat the fairy rhyme, —

“Come, Shield of mine, and plainly show
True face of friend and face of foe,”

just before the person on whom the magic was tried should look upon its polished surface.

Rolf made no objection to taking this parting gift from his father; but it was the beauty of the wrought silver and the strength of the moulded metal that chiefly pleased him, for, like most young people, he felt quite equal to

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finding out for himself the difference between what was bad and what was good, without any aid whatsoever, magical or otherwise.

But the wise old King had great faith in the fairy's gift, and he knew his son's headlong nature too well not to be rejoiced that he had been able to bestow upon him this special piece of armor.

Prince Rolf could hardly wait to kiss his royal father's hand at parting, and bid farewell to the various officials of the Court. He was quite ready for anything, except the dull round of quiet life that he was leaving. He cared not if hunger and cold were to be his portion, and as for danger the mere thought had power to make his pulse beat high with hope. He felt really sad because some days must needs go by before anything of moment was likely to happen. His father's kingdom was altogether too well governed to allow of dragons, ogres, giants, or monsters of any kind within its boundaries. The only double-headed unicorn ever seen there had been slain long ago by the hand of his great-great-grandfather, and

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the huge curved tusks of the last man-eating boar hung over the sideboard in the royal dining-room in the home Palace.

As he rather dolefully pondered on all these things, his horse's hoof hit something that lay half hidden in the dirt of the highway. It shone bright in the sunlight, and the Prince, dismounting, saw that it was a large gold locket. Curious to behold what might be within, he finally found the secret spring, and it fell open, revealing the painted picture of a young and beautiful maiden, with dusky hair, and eyes dark as midnight. Her red lips seemed to smile welcome upon him, and about the outer edge of the portrait was graven curious lettering, which the Prince slowly spelled out, finding at last that it ran in this wise, —

“Wouldst love me best? Ride to the west.
Should such love cease? Ride to the east.
Safety behind. Danger before.
Prince, beware, lest you ride no more.”

There was one rather curious thing about the way in which all this was written. The first line was beautifully and deeply engraved and

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could be most easily read, but the last three lines looked as though they had been hastily scratched with a pin or some such instrument, and Prince Strong-Arm had some trouble in making out their sense. However, he finally did so; and the double promise of beauty and danger made him turn his horse's head at once to the west, and as he rode, he often drew the locket from next his heart and gazed upon the portrait of the beautiful maiden. He felt himself already in love with her, and his thoughts roamed like busy bees collecting honey; for he dreamed of adventure in her service and of the rich reward of her love in return, should he show himself worthy of the honor.

So for several days the Prince pressed onward, and at last, one morning, he beheld the glittering roofs and turrets of a beautiful Palace, still many miles distant. As he neared it, an old Wood-cutter by the roadside called to him: "Whither dost your Lordship ride?"

Rolf pulled out his treasured picture and let the dim eyes of the old man rest upon it.

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"Does this fair maiden live in yonder Castle?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the Wood-cutter, "the Lady Nightshade dwells there; but, alas! I have seen many likely youths ride hither, and as yet none have returned."

"A maid so beautiful must indeed have suitors," said the Prince, and dropping a gold piece into the old man's cap, he spurred his horse forward.

On the steps of the Palace the damsel herself met him, and her loveliness was so great that Rolf's heart was as wax within his breast.

"The picture is not half so fair," he stammered, hardly knowing what he said, and he showed her the locket.

"Ah! my lost portrait!" she exclaimed, as if in surprise; but her face darkened as she read the last three lines of the rhyme engraved upon it. "What nonsense is this?" she asked harshly.

"Indeed, I know not," replied the Prince. "I only know that I have come westward as fast as my steed could carry me, and that I have found the most beautiful Lady in all the world."

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At this the maiden's brow smoothed once more, and with words of welcome she bade her visitor dismount, called servants to show him to his apartments and to lead away his horse, as, saying that she would see him again at the banquet that evening, she left him.

As the Prince turned to follow her into the Palace, he brushed against a ragged Kitchen Maid, who stood among the crowd of assembled lackeys. Rolf raised his cap politely and begged her pardon, for he would not willingly have been rude to any one. The Kitchen Maid opened her lips to reply, but on the instant a hand pulled her roughly back, and the Groom of the Chambers at that moment requesting the Prince to proceed, Rolf went onward and soon forgot all about the matter.

That night the Lady Nightshade gave a magnificent supper, and never had the Prince seen anything half so fine, even at the State banquets in his father's kingdom. The dishes were of gold, and the goblets were rimmed with precious stones. Soft rose-colored light fell all about, and the table was strewn with flowers. Sweet

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strains of music came from some hidden corner; gorgeous attendants in orange velvet waited silently at hand, and the pastry and cakes were in the most wonderful forms, and so cunningly fashioned into the likenesses of dragons, sea-horses, serpents, and other such monsters, that Rolf almost clapped his hand to his sword as they were borne into the Banquet Hall.

The Prince sat in a carved chair at one end of the room, and opposite him on a pile of silken cushions reclined his hostess. Her dark hair was caught with a diamond fillet, her white robe was encrusted with pearls, and her girdle was a flashing mass of jewels, even her sandals were sewn with rubies; and as for the Lady herself, the Prince felt that it would be bliss enough to die at her bidding.

Perhaps Nightshade read his thoughts; at any rate, she rose slowly from her couch, and bidding Rolf follow, betook herself to another room. This was a picture gallery, and it was filled with the portraits of many comely youths. One frame alone stood empty, and the Lady Nightshade went on to explain that all these

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were pictures of noble knights and princes who had sought her hand in marriage, but who had failed in some adventure they had undertaken in her service.

"But you," she said, turning to the Prince, "are far stronger and braver than any here, and to-morrow you shall slay the Hyptogriff."

"And this empty frame?" asked Rolf.

"Should you die in the battle, which of course I know will not happen, your portrait will complete the number;" and she gazed so bewitchingly at the foolish youth that he did not see the cruel joy that gleamed for an instant from her eyes.

Rolf went to his apartment with heart and brain awhirl. At midnight a soft voice singing without awoke him, and he heard faintly repeated, —

"Should such love cease? Ride to the east.
Safety behind. Danger before.
Prince, beware, lest you ride no more."

Rolf sprang to his feet and looked out, but could see or hear nothing further, and thinking it all a dream, he slept again.

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In the morning he started for a walk through the garden. As he did so, he saw crouching among the rosebushes the gray-clad figure of the Kitchen Maid. As he advanced, she pulled up her sleeve, and showed Rolf a bruise on the white skin, saying reproachfully at the same time, "See, Prince, what I have borne for your sake."

Rolf was about to question her when the lady of his love appeared, and frowning, bade the Kitchen Maid begone. "She is a poor half-witted wench," she said, "whom I have kindly fed and sheltered. Pay no heed, I pray you, to her complaints. And now, before you set forth on your adventure, will you not give me your Silver Shield for safe keeping?"

"It is very rusty," said Rolf, hesitating, "for indeed I have thought so much about you and your beauty that I have neglected to keep it bright."

"Never mind," Nightshade answered smiling, "I like it better so. When will you give it to me?"

"At once," Rolf replied; for he did not stop

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to think that this was a strange request, since surely a man about to do battle needs all his armor.

Indeed, he was so bewitched with his enchantress that he was quite provoked at not being able to find the Silver Shield, that he might give it to her. Search he did through all his belongings, but with no result save that Nightshade seemed very angry at the loss, and quite coldly bade him ride westward, where a mile or two hence the Hyptogriff would be found.

The Prince obeyed at once; but Nightshade's harshness had made him so sad that a voice by the roadside had to call twice before he heard and reined in his horse. There again he beheld the Kitchen Maid, and this time she reached out to him a tiny ash cake.

"I made it myself, Strong-Arm," she said; "will you not eat it to please me?"

Now Rolf was very kind-hearted if he was rather reckless and foolish; so as he did not want to hurt the poor creature's feelings, he readily assented. As soon as he had done so, a marvellous change came over him. New

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strength seemed to flow through his veins ; his muscles felt like steel and his heart grew light once more. He turned to speak to the Kitchen Maid, but she had disappeared, and he heard at that moment the angry bellowing of his enemy.

The Hyptogriff was a terrible monster. It had three heads shaped like a bull's joined to one neck that twisted and turned like a snake. Its great feet were armed with long and savage claws, and its tail was hard as iron and tipped with a sharp arrow-headed point.

When it saw the Prince, its rage knew no bounds. It stamped and tore up the earth all about, and rushed upon him. Rolf's horse was snorting with fear ; so he lightly leaped from his back, and ran behind a sheltering tree.

The Hyptogriff, stupid with rage, charged straight upon him, and striking the oak with one of its great heads, stuck the horns so far into the wood that it could not free itself. Rolf lost no time, but avoiding the fatal sweep of the monster's tail, succeeded in cutting off one of the Hyptogriff's free heads.

The monster now pawed the ground with

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added fury, and one of its terrible claws ripped the tunic from the Prince's back, and inflicted a slight wound.

But Strong-Arm had not won his name for nothing, and watching his chance, with another mighty blow he severed the creature's second head; but, alas! the Hyptogriff now was free, for unfortunately Rolf had made the mistake of cutting off the head whose horns had been fastened in the oak. The Hyptogriff at once lowered its third head, and charged.

The Prince was in the open, with no friendly shelter near. There was but one thing to do, and less than an instant in which to do it; but the little ash cake had given him wonderful strength, and as the fatal moment came, he seized the monster by the horns, and twisting its head by main strength to one side, inflicted a mortal wound with a sudden stroke of his sword; but not quite unharmed, for the Hyptogriff in its last struggle struck the Prince a glancing blow with its lance-like tail, and Rolf staggered back upon the trampled earth.

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When he again opened his eyes, the sun was setting, the cool evening breeze was blowing, and the Kitchen Maid knelt weeping by his side, bathing his hot forehead with cool water from a neighboring brook. The Hyptogriff was stretched in death at a little distance; and as the Prince looked up, still dazed from the monster's parting blow, a big black raven suddenly appeared, winging its way heavily to where he was lying.

"I must go," whispered the Kitchen Maid hurriedly; "but promise to kill that raven if you can," and before she sped away she placed a stone in his hand. Hardly knowing what he did, Rolf took aim; but his strength was not yet returned, and only a few black feathers floated down as the great bird flew sullenly into the distance.

After a little the Prince got up, and finding his horse, rode slowly back to the Palace. Here he was greeted by the Lady Nightshade, and his own hurts were forgotten when he saw that one of her fingers was bandaged. "I pricked it when spinning," she said, in answer

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to his question ; and then, clapping her hands, she bade the servants bring in the dishes for the banquet, and talked and smiled so sweetly that Rolf wished that he might conquer a dozen Hyptogriffs for her sake.

That night the Prince thought he heard again faint singing, and the same verse repeated, mingled with the sound of sobbing; but the wine that he had drunk at the banquet in the evening had made him strangely drowsy, and he did not stir.

In the morning the Kitchen Maid met him in the garden. " You will find," she said in a sad voice, " your Silver Shield in your room when you return. For your sake I hid it, for your sake I polished it, for your sake I bring it back once more ; but on your life do not let the Lady Nightshade see it until you force her to look into its shining depths. Then, and not till then, shall you know the false from the true."

These strange words set the Prince to thinking. He would fain have questioned the girl, whose voice was so sweet, though her face was smutty, her clothes ragged, and her hair hidden

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beneath a dingy cap ; but the Kitchen Maid had gone as quickly and silently as she had come.

Suddenly, as he paced the garden, he heard the rustle of wings, and a great commotion in the bushes near by, and as he looked in surprise, a white dove slowly rose from the underbrush, while a big black raven circled about the pretty creature, striking at it fiercely with its horny beak. The Prince was filled with indignation at this sight, and seizing a stone flung it, this time with no feeble hand, at the great bird, and succeeded in striking its wing ; for with a hoarse croak of anger the raven flapped lamely away, while the white dove, with a grateful look, floated in through an open window of the Palace.

A few moments later Rolf met the Lady Nightshade and was much concerned and surprised to see that one arm was bound in a silken sling. The Prince asked her at once, with tender sympathy, how she had been injured. At the question, for an instant, the Lady's eyes gleamed yellow like a cat's, but she answered sweetly, that she had missed her footing on the

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marble staircase and had hurt herself a little. "But," said she, "I have come to bid you pledge me in a glass of wine the like of which you have never tasted, and you shall drink it from a cup such as no King can boast. Having done so, I will grant your earnest wish without delay. You shall have my promise to be your bride, and I will ride east to your father's Palace in your company, should you still desire to go. Come, then, to the Banquet Hall."

Now, indeed, did the heart of the Prince leap with joy, and he told her he would follow at once, if she would but permit him first to seek his chamber and there don another coat more fitting for the ceremony. Nightshade consented, and Strong-Arm hurried to his apartment, hardly daring to believe that he had won at last this beautiful maiden for his bride.

The words of the Kitchen Maid were quite forgotten, and he stared with amazement and stood spell-bound, as on reaching his apartment her voice fell once more upon his ear, —

"Safety behind. Danger before.
Prince, beware, lest you ride no more."

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He looked all about him and could see no one, but the soft voice sang on. Then, all at once, he perceived that the words came from the white dove, who was perched upon the Silver Shield, now once again in its accustomed resting-place.

"Who are you, strange bird, and what does all this mean?" he asked.

"Dear Prince," replied the white dove, "you go to your death unless you heed my warning. She who has changed me into this shape is about to turn you into the form of a deer, when she will set her hounds upon you and they will run you down. Strong-Arm, for my sake and for your own, beware! Drink not from the jewelled cup. Raise it but to your lips, and then turning upon the sorceress, seize her by the hair. Force the cruel Nightshade to look in this magic Shield of yours; and when you at last know the truth, throw the wine into her face and bid her take her proper shape. A few drops sprinkled upon me, with the same words, and your poor but faithful friend the Kitchen Maid will stand before you safe once more."

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"Can this be true?" asked the Prince in mingled horror and amazement. "But if it be," he continued, "you shall not find me ungrateful. Kitchen Maid though you are, I will set you before me on my horse, and with me you shall ride east, and I will myself acknowledge you as my bride before the King, my father, and his Court."

"Go, then," said the dove, "for time presses and the Lady becomes impatient. Bear your Silver Shield upon your arm, and at the right moment I shall be beside you."

Rolf, therefore, hastily donned a purple mantle trimmed with ermine, with clasps of gold, and hiding his Silver Shield beneath its ample folds, he sought the Banquet Hall.

Here the beautiful Nightshade awaited him, in a robe tenfold more gorgeous than any the Prince had yet seen; and in one white hand she held a cup cut from a single emerald, with a foot of ivory inlaid with turquoise, and handles studded with diamonds. About the cup was twined a golden serpent with one glowing blood-red ruby flashing from its flattened head. With-

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in, the wine itself was ruby red and its fragrance mounted to the Prince's brain.

Nightshade's glorious eyes were fixed upon him, and her voice said in his ear, with quick command: "Drink, Prince; your reward awaits you!"

As if in a dream, Rolf seized the splendid cup and obediently raised it. Another moment, and the thing would have been done; but just as his lips parted, the soft rustle of the white dove's wing came faintly to his ear. With a quick motion he set the untasted cup upon the table, and drawing forth his Silver Shield, sternly bade the Lady Nightshade gaze upon its polished surface. She drew back with a wicked look in her dark eyes, but Strong-Arm was too quick for her. One glance into the magic mirror, and all love for the sorceress vanished forever from the Prince's heart, while the blood ran chill in his veins, for the frightful image of a hideous old hag had risen at his words of command,—

"Come, Shield of mine, and plainly show
True face of friend and face of foe."

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"Take your proper shape, cruel witch," he said, and flung the red wine in Nightshade's face, and there before his wondering eyes, in the Lady's stead, appeared a huge black raven, which struggled in the Prince's relaxing grasp, and freeing itself, slowly rose and winged its way heavily through the open casement of the Banquet Hall, and so out of sight.

Rolf then turned, and quickly sprinkled the few remaining drops of the magic draught upon the snowy pinions of the waiting dove. Here, too, the effect was instant; and the Kitchen Maid with downcast eyes stood meekly there before him.

"Let us go, dear Prince," said she. "Remember the words I wrote upon the locket after the wicked Nightshade had inscribed her verse and dropped her portrait where you could see it, —

'Should such love cease? Ride to the east.'

We are not yet out of danger, for the sorceress has many evil friends, and we had best flee from the Palace ere she returns."



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"You are always wise and right," answered the Prince; and accordingly, without loss of time, his good steed was saddled, and setting the Kitchen Maid upon the horse's back, Rolf vaulted into the saddle, and so away. They rode in silence for a long time, and at last they came to a thick grove of trees through which ran a babbling brook.

"I am tired," the Kitchen Maid said, and then meekly added: "May it please your Gracious Highness, I would fain dismount and rest, and bathe my face in yonder brook. Ride on if it meet your royal wish, and I will come to you again where the trees end and the highway stretches there before you."

So the Prince reined in his steed, and lifted the Kitchen Maid tenderly from the saddle. Then, as she had asked, he mounted once more, and rode on slowly to the meeting-place. Here the green grass at the forest edge looked so inviting that he tied his horse, and settled himself for an hour's slumber.

When he awoke a beautiful maiden, fairer far than the Lady Nightshade, stood before him.

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Her unbound hair fell in soft dark masses to her feet; her robe a simple gown of white; her eyes deep blue like wood violets; and her cheeks faintly pink like the petals of a blush rose.

"I am the Princess Heartsease," said she, "and I am ready to ride with you, my Prince, unto your father's kingdom."

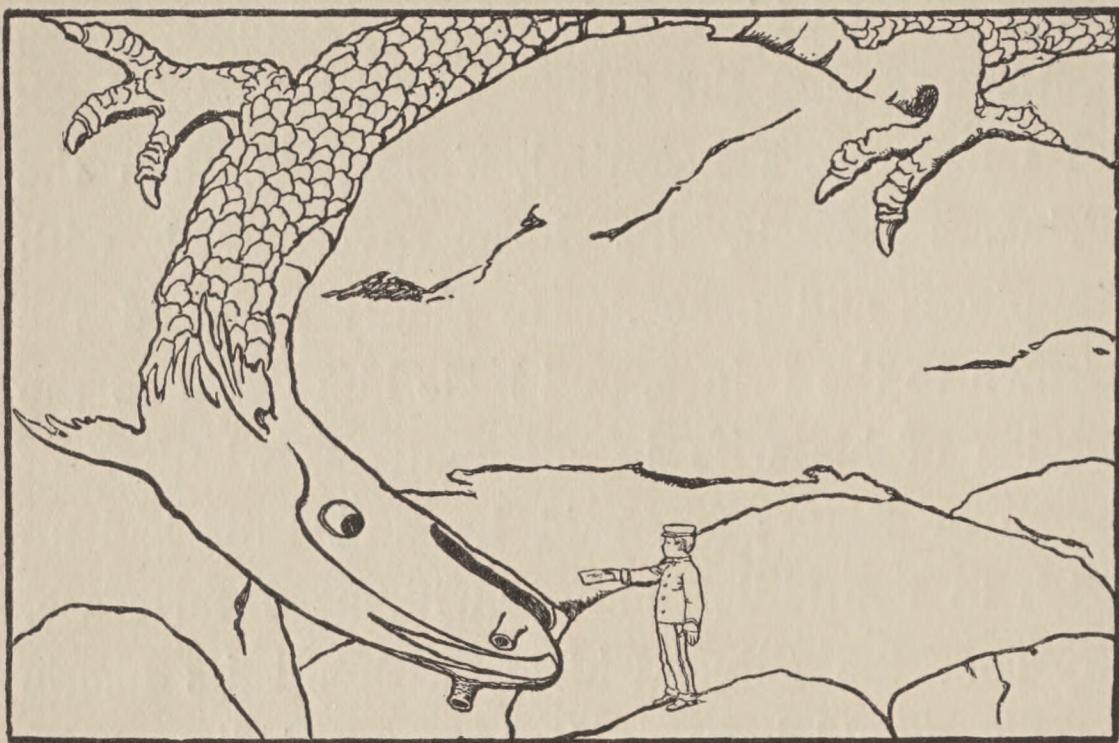
But Rolf shook his head. "Deem me not discourteous, most beautiful lady," he said, springing to his feet; "but that may not be. I wait another,—a Kitchen Maid, with a voice sweet like yours, and a heart that Queens might envy. She, and she only, shall be my bride."

Now at this the lady's eyes grew softly tender, and a radiant smile played upon her lips. "Look well!" said she. "I am the Princess Heartsease, it is true, captive of the wicked sorceress, and now free once more, but I am also the humble Kitchen Maid. Prince, will you ride with me?" And to this question one need not write the answer.

So with a Princess fair beyond dreaming Rolf went his homeward way; and when the old

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King clasped his son in his arms once more, and found that the Silver Shield reflected back an image more beautiful, if possible, than the Princess herself, his heart overflowed with happiness and peace. He gladly resigned the Crown to the Prince, and bade him listen to the advice of his wife in all matters, whether of home or State; for, said he, and Rolf had no wish to contradict him, “without Heartsease, my son, the Silver Shield, with all its magic power, would have availed you little.”



IV

HOW DANTIZOL THE DRAGON LOST HIS TAIL

MANY, many years ago, Dantizol the Dragon made his home under a great mountain on the very outskirts of a mighty kingdom. He had just come of age when my story begins, and that made him (for such is the custom with Dragons, as everybody knows) just one hundred and one years old. You might search far and wide and you would

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not find a handsomer, a bigger, or a scalier Dragon than Dantizol; and the thing of all others that he prized most, and for which he was most envied, was his tail.

This appendage was so long, and its steely blue plates were so cunningly fashioned, that Dantizol could quite comfortably lie with his head out of the opening to his home under the mountain, and yet know that his tail was coiled within coils in the winding tunnel behind him, and that its very tip lay fifty feet from where the head part of him blinked and snoozed in the summer sun. And very few Dragons could say the same, let me tell you.

Now there was something very mysterious about this tail, and I am going to let you into a secret, known only to Dantizol, his Mother, and myself: a secret that had puzzled many a wise head, as I can assure you.

The strange thing was this: when the neighboring Dragons came together to play or wrestle, or, as sometimes happened, to quarrel, they would often, either in half earnest or frolic, nip one another, and pretty good nips too.

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Now Dantizol never seemed to mind how hard they bit his tail, but would even lie lazily stretched full length, and gently wave this member to and fro, and challenge any Dragon or number of Dragons to come and do their worst. Now, as these very Dragons were extremely tender in their tails, this state of things was not a little provoking, and much would they have given to learn the true reason of this strange matter; and this is the secret that I am about to tell you.

A long time before all this, when Dantizol was yet in the nursery, and hardly more than twenty-five years of age, he had been very much like his friends in all particulars, and had you then stumbled over his tail, or bitten it by mistake, you would, I think, have been very sorry for your hasty action.

One morning, however, his wise old Mother had important business calling her from home, and had left Dantizol in his roomy underground nursery, with many injunctions not to move from the spot till her return. She had given him for dessert at dinner an extra gallon of sul-

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phur and molasses, of which he was passionately fond ; had placed his favorite toys within his reach, and had told him to be a good little Dragon and amuse himself there quietly, and that she would without fail return by sunset.

Dantizol *was* good for a time, but after a little he began to tire of his surroundings, and it occurred to him that a short journey into the outer world, which he had but seldom seen, would be a very fine and exciting thing. His idea was, like many other naughty Dragons, to get back before his Mother returned, so that she would not know anything about it, and he felt sure that he would be able to do so. Without more thought, therefore, he concluded to disobey his kind parent ; and another hour found him scrambling about in the upper world, rolling in the grass, frightening an occasional passer-by, and generally enjoying himself very much.

Perhaps, had he been contented to remain near his hole, things might not have been so bad, but he was soon dissatisfied with this amount of freedom, and, drawn by curiosity, set out for the nearest village. Imagine the

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alarm of the good people there! Of course Dantizol was only a baby Dragon, but he looked monstrously large to them, and they fled in every direction.

Dantizol strolled about, greatly enjoying the sensation he was making, and at last happened to pass a candy-shop. The door had been left open by the badly frightened owner, and it was an easy matter for Dantizol to run out his long tongue and greedily lap up the sweetmeats within. Bushels of chocolate creams, yards of molasses candy, dozens of peppermint sticks were speedily devoured. He had never had such a feast in his life, and when he topped off with a big jar of licorice drops, you will not wonder that his little stomach, accustomed to much simpler fare, began to give him notice to stop.

Dantizol, again like many other small Dragons, was quite self-sufficient when he felt well, but when he had a pain he wanted his Mother right straight away. Now, however, he dared not go home in such a plight, and he accordingly decided to try to take a short nap and see if sleep could not cure him.

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Accordingly he sought a shady spot at the bottom of a big hill, and the pain growing better he was able to drop into a light doze. From this, however, he was rudely awakened by a noise like thunder, and before he could move, a great rock fell on his tail and pinned him to the earth. A shower of stones followed, and Dantizol saw the village folk running about just out of reach and pelting him with whatever came to hand.

He was badly frightened, and while it had seemed great fun to scare other folk, he did not at all enjoy being scared himself. The worst of it was that he could not run away. He pulled and tugged, and the rain of stones fell thicker and faster. At last Dantizol gave one despairing, giant effort and was free! But, alas! his beautiful tail, the pride of his heart and his dearest possession, was left behind; and he scuttled home, a wiser but very sad little Dragon indeed, and reached his hole just as his Mother appeared around a curve of the mountain.

Perhaps here we had better draw a veil. The

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Mother Dragon was kind but firm, and she was very, very angry, as she had a right to be, with her naughty, disobedient son. Whatever she did in way of punishment certainly had an effect. Indeed Dantizol was so ashamed of himself and his conduct, and so well behaved, that at Christmas the Mother Dragon gave him an entirely new tail.

In order to do this she had been obliged to spend much of her hoarded treasure and to seek the help of three sets of people. First of all, she went to the Gnomes, who dealt in all kinds of metal and knew how to work with it; and these underworld people filled her order so well for a new Dragon's tail like the missing one, that sharp eyes indeed would be needed to see that it was not the original tail itself. Next, the thoughtful Mother sought the Fairy Queen, and persuaded her to weave a special magic charm about the shining plates, so that they would stretch more and more year by year, and thus grow slowly with the growth of her Dragon son. Lastly, she called in the aid of the Dwarfs, who are wonderful tailors, and on Christmas morning

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the new tail was firmly stitched into place; and so pleased and proud was Dantizol with his Mother's gift that he never even wriggled as the Dwarfs' needles pierced his tough skin.

That was how Dantizol came to have the mysterious kind of appendage of which I have spoken. And very particular he was, I can assure you, that each shining scale should be kept bright and that no scratches should mar the polished surface.

I wish I could go on to say that the wise old Mother Dragon's son not only began to behave himself, but also went on growing better and better. But, alas! it was not to be. He was pretty good for a time, but when he became big enough to live alone and be his own master, Dantizol gradually forgot his parent's teaching, and became not only proud and conceited, but fierce and cruel as well. His great strength and wonderful size made him feared by all, and it was fortunate indeed that natural laziness prevented his often journeying far from home.

One day, however, the Dragon became restless and set out toward the King's Palace.

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There, in the royal gardens, played the little Princess, his Majesty's only daughter. She was a dear little maid, about six years of age, with yellow curls, blue eyes, and a mouth that was usually smiling at something or somebody. Everybody loved the Princess Rosebud, as she was called, and it was a real pleasure to have her about, so sweet and sunny was her temper.

It had been so long since the Dragon had been seen or heard from, that nobody expected his coming, and when his great head appeared over the garden wall, her Highness's nurses, I'm sorry to say, promptly lost their heads and took to their heels, leaving the little Princess quite alone with the monster.

Now Dantizol had never seen anything quite so dainty as this little figure. From her white pinafore embroidered with the royal arms, he knew at once that this was the King's daughter, and immediately it entered into his wicked head to capture her and bear her away to his den beneath the mountain. What he would do with her then, he would decide later. Now, however, he thrust a great horny paw over the wall,

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picked up the Princess, and sauntered slowly away, knowing well how powerless was the King, whose whole army, had it been on the spot, could hardly have stayed his progress.

The mingled wrath and sorrow of Rosebud's poor father you may easily imagine. He at once sent troops in pursuit of the Dragon, but Dantizol had already reached his hole with his prisoner, and no one dared follow him further.

Then in despair the King made proclamation that whoever should restore his daughter unharmed, and drive the Dragon from his dominions, should be laden with honors and treasure, and should have granted him, no matter at what cost, the first thing afterward that might be asked for.

Between sorrow and affection for the poor little Princess, and desire for the great rewards offered, a number of knights started on the King's errand. But one look at the hole in the mountain was enough for most of them, and the bravest hardly got beyond the first turning ; for there the rumble of the Dragon's conversation would reach them, and the sound of his great

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body sliding along the tunnelled way would send them scrambling home faster than they had come.

There chanced, however, to live not far from the mountain a poor widow, whose only son, Roland, a lad of ten years of age, was a fine, bright boy ; kind to his mother and hard-working, and a great admirer of the Princess Rosebud, whom he had often seen at a distance when making his way about the city.

Roland had felt very badly indeed when the news of the capture of the Princess had reached him, and as he had often seen Dantizol, he knew at once how hard a thing it would be to rescue the little maid from the monster's clutches. The boy knew also something more about the Dragon than he had yet told to any one. He had often talked about the monster with an old gray-haired man, who lived some distance off, and who had as a child seen the Dragon the day that he had lost his tail.

Roland had always been very much interested in the story ; he knew, from what the old man said, that Dantizol had gone into the moun-

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tain tailless and had not very long afterward appeared with as fine a tail as one would wish to see. The old man said he knew from the creature's markings that it must be the same Dragon who had come in and out; and on the other hand, the big book on the subject, in the Public Library, had said positively that Dragons could not grow a second tail, should the first unfortunately be lost.

The lad was a bright boy, as I have said, and he had taken, some months before the capture of the Princess, to watching Dantizol's movements. He soon saw how very careful the Dragon was of this part of his body, and how proud he seemed of its glistening blue scales; and after Rosebud's capture the boy thought more and more of the matter, and at last made up his mind exactly what to do.

First of all he went to the Public Library once more, and looked up all the information he could get in the Dragon Book, under "*H.*" "*Habitation*" he passed over quickly, for he knew already where Dantizol lived; but at "*Habits*" he stopped a long time, and he learned

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one thing of great value: After a hearty meal all Dragons are apt to sleep, but to sink them in a dreamless slumber that will last till sunset, it is necessary to feed them on flour and honey.

To Roland now the whole thing seemed plain, and he sought admission to the royal presence in order to tell his plan. But this first step was not so easy as he had hoped. Numberless officials wanted to know why he wished to see the King, and when at last he told them he desired an order for a thousand barrels of flour and a hundred casks of honey with which to feed the Dragon, they, one and all, shouted with laughter, and at last he was turned out of the royal precincts and told to be gone about his business and leave the work of rescue to older and wiser heads than his.

The poor boy, therefore, went sorrowfully away; but his courage came once more when by great good luck he learned that a big train of flour-laden wagons was on its way to the King's granaries, and that several dozen crates of honey and other provisions were to be carried as well at the same time.

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The caravan he found would pass near the mountain on the way to the city about sunrise the following day. The thing now was to acquaint the Dragon of this circumstance, and to do this Roland borrowed a suit from a friendly messenger boy, and wrote the following note on a piece of yellow telegram paper :—

“Fifty wagon loads of flour. Several hundred jars of fine honey. Other provisions of the best quality. To pass the mountain at daybreak. The pleasure of your company is earnestly requested.”

Then he proceeded to the opening of the Dragon’s cave, and had the good fortune to see the monster sunning his ugly length near his hole. Without a moment’s delay Roland walked straight up to him and presented his message.

Now the Dragon was very conceited, as has been said, and he could not bear to have any one think he was ignorant of any matter whatsoever ; but he had never learned to read, and he was ashamed to let even this small boy find this out. So he squirmed a little and then asked, “Who are you ?”

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"A messenger: you might see by my uniform," answered Roland, promptly.

"And this?" questioned the Dragon, rather mortified at his first mistake, and touching the paper as he spoke with his scaly paw.

"Why, it's a message. Don't you know what that means?"

"Of course, of course," said the Dragon, testily, and he took the paper and held it upside down. "Who's it from?" he continued.

"Why, it's from the one who wrote it," answered the boy; "who else could it be from? But maybe you can't read it."

"Oh, I can read it fast enough," answered Dantizol, quickly, "but you see I've—that is—my eyeglasses, you know, I've mislaid them somewhere, and I'm a trifle near-sighted. Suppose you read it?"

So Roland in a business-like way rattled off the invitation.

The Dragon scratched his head with his paw. "It's all right, I suppose," he began doubtfully, "but—"

"I guess you've never had many telegrams,"

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Roland interrupted. "I s'pose I'd better go back and tell them so. I'll say you don't understand, and you're not—"

"Coming!" roared the Dragon. "You'd better believe I'm coming. I didn't see just at first that it *was* a telegram. That makes all the difference, of course;" and he backed majestically into his hole, while Roland took to his legs in high glee at the success of his venture.

Just before daybreak our hero rose quietly, snatched a hasty breakfast, and soon reached the spot where the King's wagons were to pass.

Sure enough, as the sun rose, Roland saw in the distance the leading horses, with the driver walking at their head. He was so interested in watching their slow advance, that he did not hear a stealthy gliding behind him, and looked up just as Dantizol's huge length cast its shadow over him.

The Dragon had already smelt the approaching train, and paid no attention to Roland, who watched the monster with quickly beating heart, as he stood snuffing the air, with one huge paw

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upraised and every polished scale glittering in the morning light.

At that instant horses and men caught sight of their enemy, and at once the greatest confusion reigned. The beasts plunged so madly in their terror that they broke their traces and galloped off in the opposite direction, closely followed by their drivers, not a man of them wishing to see the monster at close quarters.

Dantizol had been a very greedy little baby Dragon, and he was not the less so now. His appetite, too, had grown amazingly, and he fell at once upon the overturned wagons and proceeded to break open barrel after barrel with blows from his powerful paws or tail, and generally demolish the crates and boxes in which the good things were packed. You would hardly believe your eyes, had you seen at what rate the flour, honey, pressed figs, dried fruit and all, disappeared. Dantizol stopped at nothing. He licked up with relish a gallon of tomato ketchup, and whole dozens of pickled limes went down his throat at a single gulp.

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The drivers, seeing that the Dragon had no interest for them, drew a little nearer; but it was Roland's sharp eyes that detected the first symptoms of drowsiness in the great beast. Dantizol yawned so that he could have taken in an ordinary-sized cottage at one bite. He showed the whole of his pink-lined mouth, his arrow-headed tongue, and every one of his gleaming double-fanged rows of teeth.

Then he ate a little more, but by this time his vast sides were sticking out and it was evidently hard for him to find room for the few remaining provisions. However, he managed to swallow them all, and even lapped up the honey that he had spilt upon the ground. Then his red eyes grew dimmer, his great head dropped upon his paws, his tail quivered once and was still; and Dantizol the Dragon slept.

Without losing a moment, Roland sprang upon the back of his unconscious foe, nor did his enemy so much as rattle a single scale as he did so. Then with dexterous fingers he sought for evidence that the beast's great tail was a false one, and to his joy much careful

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search revealed the stitches that the Dwarf tailors had taken so many years ago.

Roland at once began to hack and hew at the stout thread with his knife, but he found it no easy job, I can tell you, for the thread was as spun steel and the Dwarf tailors had done their sewing well. In vain he shouted to the cowardly drivers to come and help him. No threats or promises would induce one of them to approach nearer than twenty feet, and the brave boy had to settle down to the hardest day's work he had ever known. Of course he had often to stop and rest, and wipe the perspiration from his dripping forehead; but he kept thinking of poor little Rosebud, shut up somewhere in the gloomy cave beneath the mountain, and the hope of her rescue nerved his tired arm to fresh efforts.

The blazing noonday sun beat down upon the same group,—the crowd of watching men, the wearied boy, the slumbering monster. At last, with a thankful heart, Roland cut the last stitch, and the gaping teamsters saw the Dragon's tail slowly fall away from his body.

Almost too tired to stand, Roland climbed

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down from the monster's back, and by dint of much pleading and promises of reward in the King's name, he got some help at last, and persuaded the men to drag the empty shell to some distance and cover it from sight with the bushes that grew near by.

Hardly had this been accomplished when the monster showed signs of waking, and Roland, remembering that but half of his task was done, forgot his fatigue, and ran with all the speed he could to the Dragon's mountain home. Down the opening he popped, and so on and on through the gloomy, darkened tunnel, till at last he reached the mountain's heart and a dim light glowed in the distance. This he found came from a fire in the centre of a vast stone-lined cavern, in one corner of which cowered a sadly crumpled, very frightened little girl.

Just as he reached her, Roland heard a tremendous snorting and rumbling in the distance, and knew that the Dragon had awakened before the time and was on his track.

“Quick! quick!” he called to the Princess, and took her little hand in his; and Rosebud,

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filled with joy to see a human face again, obediently stood on her feet. Roland then saw that she was tied to a ring in the wall by a stout rope, but a few swift cuts of his well-tried knife soon settled that difficulty, and the Princess was free.

Freed from the rope, that is, but not from her gloomy prison ; and worst of all, at that moment they heard the great beast coming at a terrible pace straight down the underground passage. In the cavern there was no spot where they might hide, but the boy remembered in his flight through the tunnel that the smooth wall was broken in one place, and it was this niche in the solid rock that they sought on the instant.

Roland almost pulled the little Princess off her feet, he ran so fast ; but Rosebud's terror of the Dragon was so great that she did not mind, but did her utmost to keep up with her new-found friend. And with all their efforts they were barely in time to crouch trembling in the little recess of the tunnelled wall, for they had but just reached it when Dantizol went lumbering by.

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Now, as you must know, Dragons have keen noses, and in ordinary circumstances a fly could not have hidden there without the monster's finding it; but Dantizol was not quite himself. His hearty meal, his nap, his sudden waking to see that his precious, his beautiful tail was gone, — all this had combined to fuddle his wits, and his one idea at the time was to reach his cavern.

So he did not pause on his onward rush; and when he had passed, the children did not once stop for breath till they were well out of the mountain and on their way to Roland's home. By now, the sun had set, and the little Princess was too weary — to say nothing of Roland — to go farther that night.

Imagine the surprise and joy of the widow when the wonderful story was told her, and how she praised Roland, and how she petted the Princess, who nestled close in her arms; how she fed them on bread and milk (the Dragon had tossed crumbs to Rosebud somewhat as one feeds a canary, yet she was hungry); how she wept over them both; and lastly, how she

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kissed Roland good-night, and having sung the Princess to sleep, tucked both children snugly into their beds.

Then she seized upon Rosebud's white frock and her pinafore, and washed them and patted them and clear-starched them and wrung them out and ironed them and fluted them and aired them, so that by morning the little Princess should be fitly dressed once more.

Before breakfast the next day, when the widow was washing the Princess's face and tying her golden curls with a ribbon, Roland slipped from the cottage, for he knew that there was one thing yet to be done before he could with a quiet mind present the King with his rescued daughter.

This thing was to interview the Dragon ; and only duty urged Roland on, for he had but little liking for the errand that lay before him. Probably Dantizol would be feeling strangely queer and light in his hinder part, probably too he would be having a bad attack of indigestion from all the things he had eaten yesterday, and, more than all, it was extremely probable indeed

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that the loss of the Princess and of his beautiful tail would have thrown him into the worst of humors.*

Poor Roland! The first view of the angry Dragon confirmed all his fears, which the monster's greeting did not help to lessen.

"Mortal boy!" roared Dantizol, as he caught sight of the trembling lad. "A fine thing you have done with your messages and telegrams; but don't flatter yourself that you are to escape. I shall eat you now for breakfast, first of all, and then I'll ravage the whole country. I'll teach people to meddle with my belongings!" and he stretched out one big paw to clutch his victim.

But Roland did not move. "Eat me if you wish," he said coolly, for he saw that only courage could save him, "but a fine figure you'll cut, ravaging the country without a tail. Yes, you may well blush," for at this the Dragon certainly did look mortified; "but I'll have you know that I'm the only person who can get it back for you."

Now at these words Dantizol trembled with

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eagerness. "Could you really show me where it is, if I should spare your life?" he asked.

"You've got to do more than that," answered Roland. "You've got to promise as well to leave the kingdom, right off, and never come back again. Your tail is just as good as ever, it isn't hurt a bit, and you can have it back just as soon as you swear by the third hind toe of your grandmother's left paw to do as I have said."

You see now how good a thing it was that Roland had learned so much from the Dragon Book in the Public Library, for an oath of this sort no Dragon would dare to break, and Dantizol saw that he had been trapped.

It made him very, very angry, for he wanted to eat Roland dreadfully and he wanted to make everybody just as scared and unhappy as he could. In fact, there was just one thing that he wanted more, and that happened to be his tail. He had found it very awkward getting on without it, even for these few hours, and he could n't bear to think of the other Dragons, his friends,

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finding out about the scrape into which he had fallen.

"If you don't promise," said Roland, "the King will have your old tail broken up, and you could n't use it then if you wanted to."

At this dreadful thought the Dragon turned very pale, and in a few faltering words, without more ado, repeated the solemn promise ; and Roland, hardly daring to believe his ears, could with difficulty refrain from shouting out loud with joy.

However, he managed to keep a very solemn and dignified look, and led Dantizol straight to the spot where the precious tail was hidden. The Dragon seized it in his teeth and drew it swiftly to his home, and there beneath the mountain, that very day, the Dwarf tailors visited him and sewed it on securely once again. He had been such a wicked Dragon that I fear I don't care very much if their sharp needles did prick him ; and I am glad to be able to say that, the thing being done, Dantizol at once departed, nevermore to return.

As for Roland, he ran back to the cottage,

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now quite free from care, and he found the little Princess all dressed and quite impatient to return to her father. And that journey back to the Palace! Certainly, neither of them would ever forget it. Great crowds turned out to see them pass, and the word ran like lightning from one to another that the sturdy boy walking beside their beloved Princess had been the one to rescue her and overcome the terrible Dragon.

The King heard the good news before they reached the royal precincts, and when he caught his little daughter to his heart and shook Roland warmly by the hand, you could hardly hear yourself think for the cheering of the multitude. All over the city the bells were rung, flags waved, the bands played, soldiers presented arms, and the greatest joy and excitement prevailed.

The King sat on his throne, with Rosebud on his right hand and Roland on his left, and when he had heard all the story, he commanded the School Committee to have it put in all the Readers, so that every pupil throughout the land should become familiar with the tale.

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He likewise ordered a public yearly holiday throughout the kingdom, and granted at once Roland's first request, which was that he might live always with the Princess. Rosebud clapped her hands with glee at this permission, and the two children went off gayly hand in hand.

The King was a monarch who never did anything by halves, so he charged the Lord High Treasurer to see that Roland was provided with all things needful and many extras, and to look to it that the silk and velvet furnished for his wardrobe were of the finest quality.

Roland now lived daytimes in the Palace and went to school with the Princess, but at night he still slept, as before, in his mother's humble cottage, for that good lady would not hear of transferring her abode to more splendid apartments.

One thing only the widow wanted, and that was a black silk dress for Sundays ; and this was her son's first purchase with the pocket money that the Lord High Treasurer allowed him ; and the gift was more to his mother than all the gold and silver in that exalted person's keeping.

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As you have doubtless seen by this time, Roland was a pretty sensible boy, and all this success and attention did not turn his head. He remembered how foolish Dantizol had looked when in his conceited way he had tried to pretend knowledge of things of which he was really ignorant, and he decided to try never to look like that himself.

So he studied hard and learned a good deal, and was well liked by everybody; and if you should ask me who, next to his mother, loved him the best, I would answer, the Princess Rosebud.



* V

THE FAITHFUL PORCUPINE

ONCE upon a time, many years ago, there lived a Prince who took the greatest delight in hunting. Sometimes the whole Court would be up and astir by four o'clock in the morning, and the common people, hearing the gallop of hoofs and the baying of hounds, would open one eye lazily and then turn over for another comfortable nap, feeling very glad indeed that they did not have to accompany his Highness at that early hour.

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The courtiers themselves didn't like it very well, either, and when the Prince got so far as to rout them out of their beds at midnight for just one more moonlit adventure, their discontent knew no bounds, and perhaps the heir might have lost his throne in consequence, had not one day a strange thing happened.

On this occasion the royal huntsman was, as usual, in advance of his train; in fact, he had left them a couple of miles or so back in the forest, and had dismounted, when the wild boar he was pursuing turned and with a sudden rush overbalanced the rash youth, who was for the moment entirely at the creature's mercy. What might have happened then is easy to imagine, but just as the great beast's tusks ripped up the Prince's hunting-coat, a Porcupine appeared from the surrounding underbrush, and shooting out several of its barbed quills, pierced the boar's brain, so that it gave an expiring gasp at the very moment that the victim had given up all hope.

"Noble Porcupine! How can I ever repay you?" cried the Prince, springing to his feet;

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and only the extreme prickliness of this new-found friend prevented him from embracing it on the spot. Indeed his excitement and relief were so great that when the Porcupine replied in very good English, it did not seem for the moment at all out of the common run of things.

"If you really feel that you owe me your life," it said in a queer, rumbling kind of voice, "you will give up this foolish hunting and leave my brother animals in peace in the forest. As for me, I wish to see something of high life, and I would like to go back with you as your guest to the Palace."

"Certainly," the Prince answered, though he looked rather crestfallen. "I should be delighted to have you visit me, but about the hunting now—"

The Porcupine clicked its long teeth together somewhat viciously. "The hunting must stop," it said decidedly. "It has been ordained in solemn council this very day, and if you persist in continuing, the animals will all band together and attack you at once, so that you will certainly lose the life that I have just saved. Come

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now, think up some other sport. As for me, take me with you and I'll be a friend worth having."

"Very well," the Prince answered, seeing that there was no help for it; and just then his train came up, very much out of breath; and they looked with the greatest surprise and disgust at the Porcupine when they heard that it was to be an inmate of the Palace. But when their master went on to declare in mournful tones that his hunting days were over, they had the hardest work in the world to keep from laughing out loud with delight and to look, on the contrary, as sad as was expected of them.

The whole party, therefore, turned back; the Prince having first with his gauntleted hands carefully lifted the Porcupine to his saddle bow, the Porcupine in its turn trying politely to keep as many of its barbed quills to itself as possible.

Things went on pretty smoothly after this for a while, till the new visitor became so used to Court life that it was a little careless. For instance, you could hardly blame the Prime Min-

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ister, a very fat and important person, for being angry when he sat suddenly down in his own particular chair, only to find that the Porcupine had been taking a nap there before him.

And even the Prince was displeased to find the faithful creature snuggled up and gently snoring in the very middle of the royal bed, just as the Chief-Tucker-In had warmly disposed the counterpane about the Prince's person.

One day at dinner the Head Footman gave the new visitor a kick, when nobody was looking, and then, strange to say, instantly dropped the platter he was holding and hopped about the table in a manner very different from that of Head Footmen in general, crying, "Ow! Ow!" with several porcupine quills sticking in the calf of his leg.

Yes, there was no doubt whatever about it,—the Porcupine was sometimes an inconvenient creature to have about; and the Prince sighed whenever he thought of its marvellous fidelity, for it was loyal to an amazing degree, and had a most unpleasant habit of rubbing itself affectionately against its master. After a few of these loving

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demonstrations the Prince gave orders for a fine suit of chain armor to be made, and rarely laid it aside, day or night.

Perhaps the Porcupine began to see that it was somewhat unpopular. At any rate, one morning it disappeared and returned bearing upon its quills a great quantity of clay, in which were stuck both lumps of gold and jewels. Then, indeed, was it really welcomed; and even the Prime Minister, who had early secured a fine diamond, was heard to say that perhaps, with all its faults, the creature might have its uses.

Late that evening, when Prince and Porcupine were at last alone, the new visitor spoke. "Master," it said, "for a long time I have noticed that you are dull and out of sorts. Why not come with me on a tour of adventure? The treasure that I have brought to-day is a mere handful beside other riches that I can show you; and beside, I know of a captive Princess who is very beautiful, and who complains with reason that things are not as they were in olden days, since not even one handsome young Prince has

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so far come to her rescue. To release her will be really far more exciting than hunting, for the danger is greater, and the reward, believe me, is as great as the danger."

Now at these words the Prince's face brightened, and the upshot of the matter was that he stole away from the Palace that very night, disguised as a beggar; and the Porcupine, who from its nature couldn't be disguised, trotted along beside him.

Once out on the high-road, the Prince began to feel as merry as a school boy with all vacation before him, and as happy as a lark. "Hurry up, old 'Porky,'" said he to his companion, who was rather huffed at this undignified mode of address; and suiting the action to the word, the noble youth turned a handspring in most unroyal fashion, and set such a pace afterward for the Porcupine that you could hear at some distance its quills rattling like a bundle of castanets.

But good humor is almost always contagious, and soon the Porcupine began to be rather gay also, and helped to pass away the time by tell-

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ing some very interesting stories about itself and its relations, and spoke too at length about a certain fairy, first cousin on its mother's side, through whom it had attained the useful gift of human speech.

It was by the help of this same person that the Porcupine had been able to find out all about the Princess Rosalinda, who was shut up in a Brazen Tower on a desert Island, guarded by an Ogre, who was only prevented from eating his captive by the fact that he had not so far felt very hungry and preferred to keep the lady, if possible, since he considered her very much in the light of bait in the trap which he had set for adventurous youths to come to.

On this subject the Prince held very decided views, and while he was prepared to run his head into danger as fast as his feet could carry him, he foresaw, with the aid of his prickly friend, a very different outcome to the matter than that expected by the Ogre.

At any rate, the very thought of the beautiful Rosalinda's danger was enough to nerve his arm to tremendous deeds of strength, and he would

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hardly listen to the more wary Porcupine when it besought him to temper boldness with discretion and wait till nightfall to approach the desert Island, when it was the Ogre's custom to take his daily walk, which according to the doctor's advice would prevent dyspepsia, — a thing all Ogres hate.

At last this wiser scheme was adopted, and a friendly Dolphin having kindly taken them on his back to the Island, the Porcupine dug a trench in the sand, in which it and the Prince could hide, and there they remained till they heard the retreating footsteps of their enemy.

Then again it was this faithful servant of the Prince who helped the royal youth out of still another difficulty, for when they reached the Brazen Tower, they found that the wily Ogre had omitted to put in a door, and the only opening was a single window, near which the lovely Rosalinda sat combing her golden hair with an ivory comb and singing most bewitchingly to herself.

The moon lit up this attractive picture, and the Prince was simply wild to speak with the

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fair damsel, but could not attract her attention. Therefore, by his prickly friend's advice, he fastened a leaf of his note-book to one of the faithful animal's quills, which the Porcupine immediately shot with great violence through the window; and the astonished Princess on picking it up found her first love letter, together with the announcement that a champion had now come who would soon save her from the Ogre's toils.

Of course, Rosalinda dared not call down to this handsome young defender, with his queer beast beside him, for fear of the Ogre, who might even then be within hearing; so she nodded and smiled, and finally kissed her hand, and after that the poor Porcupine had hard work to draw its royal master away, though the great form of the wicked jailer already loomed up in the distance.

However, it did finally succeed, and all would have gone well had not the pair unfortunately forgotten that their footprints had been left in the sand, and had not the sharp eyes of the monster spied them at once. Flourishing his

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club, he strode after the intruders, and had not the amiable Dolphin appeared in the very nick of time to bear them away from the Island, this story would have had a short and sad ending.

As it was, there was trouble enough, since the Ogre now knew that at last a youth had come prepared to carry away the Princess, and his heart was filled with wicked glee, so that he immediately read over in the latest Cook-books all the ways of serving Princes, and at last decided to have this one on toast.

Meanwhile he kept such a tireless watch on his fair captive that it was impossible to land upon the Island without the monster's knowledge, and the Prince grew so impatient at the very idea of waiting longer that at last the Porcupine had to think up another and a bolder plan of attack. One fine morning soon after, therefore, the Dolphin again bore the pair toward the Island, and when they were within speaking distance, the Prince called aloud to the Ogre and offered to make terms with him.

"If I can furnish you with a dish that you cannot eat, will you let me bear the Princess

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away in safety," he said, "for should I fail I will at once give myself up to you and you shall have your will with me."

Now the Ogre thought this a fine proposal, for his teeth were so strong that he had not the slightest difficulty in cracking paving stones with them as easily as though they had been walnuts; and as for diet, there was not much eatable that he had not already tried, and when he consumed horned cattle, he never bothered much if the horns had not first been removed. At the same time he had his preferences, and a fine young Prince for dinner was one of them. It did n't, therefore, seem much of a risk, and he concluded to agree, since the plan he felt sure would bring him his favorite meal without the bother of catching it beforehand. The time for the test was set for sundown the next evening, and then the Dolphin carried the Prince and the Porcupine back to the mainland, after promising to ferry them across once again the following night.

Meanwhile the Ogre took some special physical culture exercises warranted to give an ap-

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tite, and drank several bottles of tonic for the same excellent reason ; then he cracked a grind-stone or two in pieces with his big double teeth, to make sure that they were in good working order ; and lastly, he told the Princess to cheer up and be happy once more, for he was really well pleased with her and the fine work she had done in bringing such a delicately fed young Prince to the Island, and that he should be served and garnished in the very latest manner.

Now at this Rosalinda burst into a torrent of tears, and cried so much that the desert waste beneath her window grew quite green in consequence; while the Ogre only grinned, and picked his teeth with a splintered pine-tree, and chuckled when the Princess called him “Wretch” and “Monster” and all the abusive names she could think of.

On the other hand, the Prince himself was rather down-hearted, while the Porcupine was as merry as possible; yet when the hour of the trial came, only the Prince appeared, bearing in his arms a great covered silver dish.

“Fe! Fi! Fo! Fum!” growled the Ogre,

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after the manner of Ogres of all ages, when he caught sight of his intended victim. "What's in that fine dish of yours, my young friend? Not more than enough for a mouthful, I'll warrant;" and his grumbling sounded like the dull roar of thunder, as the Prince landed on the Island and walked straight up to the meeting-place.

"For an Ogre of your well-known appetite and strength, perhaps it is n't," replied the royal youth, politely taking off his cap to Rosalinda, who, quite pale with fright, was hanging out of her window in the Brazen Tower and watching the whole proceeding.

"Let's see it, at any rate," sneered the monster, "since I am already hungry enough to eat platter and all."

The Prince therefore removed the cover of the dish, and there was revealed, as you may have already guessed, the faithful Porcupine rolled up tight into a motionless, bristling ball.

"Um—um—ah—" hesitated the Ogre, rather taken aback at this unlooked-for sight. "Do mortals ever eat such meat as this?"

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"Certainly," answered the Prince; "but perhaps you, being only a second-rate Ogre, cannot, after all, stomach such dainty fare. Just say you are beaten, therefore, and get you gone, and I'll call it square."

"Not so fast, my fine young Cock!" roared the monster, now thoroughly enraged; and he seized the Porcupine and took a good big mouthful of bristling quills, which our prickly friend had left quite loose for the purpose.

"Ug! Ug!" he roared, dancing about in rage and pain on the instant, and trying to pull out the barbed darts, which only went in deeper for his struggles; and finding this to be the case, the haughty monster at length dropped on his knees and besought the Prince to get the quills out in some way, seeing which the Porcupine suddenly came to life once more and laughed hoarsely at its discomfited enemy.

"Leave the Island at once, then," ordered the Prince, sternly, "and give me your word hereafter to join the Vegetarian Society, which means that you are never, never, under any circumstances, to eat meat again. Also, you must

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promise not to molest either the Princess, my Porcupine, or myself further."

"I will, I will," answered the now humbled Ogre.

"And you'd better," said the Porcupine, fiercely, "or I'll call up my brother Porcupines and we will shoot off our quills at you till you look like a pincushion stuck full of needles."

At this terrible threat the Ogre grew paler yet; and the Prince, having compassion on his foe, pulled out with a good deal of difficulty the mouthful of darts which his enemy had so foolishly tried to swallow. When the last one was gone, the monster took to his heels and, boarding a raft that was hidden in the lee of the Island, paddled away in the water with such haste that he was soon nothing more than a black speck in the distance, and a moment later was lost to sight.

Without wasting any time, the Prince now ran to the shore, where he had concealed a ladder made all of twisted eel grass, and this he flung up to the Princess's window, where Rosalinda made it fast, and having safely descended

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was soon in her preserver's arms ; the Porcupine at that moment tactfully looking out to sea.

When the pair were a little calmer, Rosalinda told the sad story of her capture. She was, it appeared, the only child of the Monarch of a kingdom near by, and her father had lost by the wicked Ogre's hands, not only his daughter, but all his treasure as well. ✓

"It's no use your trying to make it up to him out of your own pocket," said Rosalinda, as the Prince generously broke into her recital with an offer of help, "for the King, my father, is very proud, and the only thing possible would be for you to aid him to discover new treasure for himself, without letting him suspect that you knew anything about it beforehand."

The Porcupine now interrupted : "Do you not remember, Master, the lumps of gold and the jewels that I brought home one day in the Palace ? I can lead you to the spot where I found them ; but, alack ! since then, my cousin the fairy tells me a spell has been laid upon the place, of what nature I do not know ; and I would advise you to consult Gray Goose as to

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the best means of removing it, before trying to even see the treasure."

"You darling!" said the Princess, clapping her hands in glee. "How clever of you to think of it!" and if you had been there, you would have seen the rarest of sights,—a Porcupine's smile.

But the Prince would not agree. His hasty spirit would not brook delay, and the idea of a Goose helping him seemed too ridiculous to consider for a moment. "If you really know where the treasure is, lead us there at once," he said to the Porcupine.

"But let us go by way of my father's kingdom," begged the Princess; and of course her word was law.

Now, when Rosalinda's parents saw their daughter once again, whom they had given up for lost, their joy knew no bounds, and they readily consented to her marriage with her brave and handsome young preserver. Unfortunately, such an event, to be properly celebrated, would cost money, and the Lord High Treasurer already went about with his pockets

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turned inside out, to show the sad state of the country's finances. Things were really pretty serious, for the people, too, were beginning to complain at the extreme shabbiness of the Court and their rulers.

In vain the King did his best to conceal the patched condition of what was now his best mantle; and in vain the good Queen sat up late into the night with her handmaids, trying to darn the royal stockings. The Crown jewels, of course, were gone, and the paste ones that the King bought were too poor to deceive anybody. As for his consort, she was forced to wear such an old-fashioned bonnet that the very farmers' wives giggled at it behind their hands; while the royal pair sat down daily at the banquet table to a meal of pickled herring or some such frugal dish, served under protest by haughty footmen who could with difficulty restrain their scorn. Everybody's salary was months behind-hand, and the Lord High Executioner threatened loudly to leave unless paid in full: a most awkward state of affairs, as I can assure you.

When, therefore, the Prince tactfully begged

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his intended father-in-law to give him the benefit of his years and experience in the matter of finding a treasure that was said to be not very far off, the old Monarch at once assented. It was judged best not to let any one else into the secret; so the King, the Prince, and Rosalinda set out without escort, the Porcupine, sadly shaking its head in grave disapproval, leading the way.

Through a maze of woodland paths, ever twisting and turning, the wise animal proceeded, never once mistaking the road, and after some hard scrambling through the underbrush, in which the old King's garments were rent beyond repair, the faithful beast stopped short and bade the party look through the thicket which enclosed a clearing in the forest. This they did, one and all, and having parted the screen of leaves, their eyes were dazzled by a great pile of glittering gold and jewels, that flashed with every color of the rainbow.

Not heeding the warning cry of the Porcupine, at this glad sight the old Monarch broke through the brush and clutched the shining treas-

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ure ; but, alas ! on the instant he was changed to stone before their very eyes, and Rosalinda, rushing to her father's rescue, tripped and fell, touching the heap of gold as she did so, and was immediately turned to stone in her turn.

Sadly the Prince followed, keeping well back from the glittering mass that had caused all this trouble ; and as his eyes grew accustomed to the glare he saw that several other wayfarers had met with a similar fate, and that even a butterfly that had alighted on the shining jewels had been turned into stone, like the mortals about him.

“ Alack ! good Master ! ” said the Porcupine. “ Let us go hence and seek the aid of Gray Goose, since without his help neither you nor I can ever hope to repair this folly.”

By this time our hero had realized his own rashness in not following his faithful friend's advice in the beginning, and was only too willing to do what he could now to make up for his obstinacy, and undo all this mischief. With hanging head he therefore resumed his journey, and his misery was so apparent that the Porcu-

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pine was too kind-hearted to add to it by words of rebuke.

In silence they continued on their way, till at last curiosity got the better of the Prince's anger at his own foolishness, and he asked his companion, "Who is this wonderful Gray Goose?"

"He is a friend to all animals," answered the Porcupine, "and has more wisdom in the tip of one feather than all the rest of us put together." You see in its excited admiration the Porcupine unconsciously spoke in rhyme. "He is not particularly favorable to mortals," it continued, "because of that sad happening (you know the goose who laid the golden eggs and was ungratefully killed by his mistress—he chanced to be a relation, and Gray Goose has never forgotten it). However, since you made that Ogre stop eating us and also have given up hunting yourself, I think we can hope for assistance."

Hardly had the Porcupine finished, when a voice came from an adjoining thicket. "Quite right, my friend," it said; and Gray Goose himself waddled forth and fixed his shrewd eyes on

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the Prince. "What is it, young man?" he asked. "Love or gold? For your kind usually want help in one or other of these matters."

"With me," answered the Prince, "it is both;" and he told all his story.

"Hum, hum, ha!" said the Gray Goose, thoughtfully scratching his head with one webbed foot. "So you want this treasure, and you desire as well to bring these stone people to life once more. Well, there's but one way out of it. You've got to find some mortal who cares for neither gold nor jewels, and who would rather have a crust of bread and a bowl of milk any day. Over such a one the spell has no power, and a person of this kind has only to touch these poor transformed mortals to release them also, while the enchantment of the treasure will be dispelled in the same fashion. Just a touch — that's all."

"But where can I ever find such a one?" asked the Prince, in despair.

"Go and look, Stupid," said Gray Goose, shutting his eyes to show that the interview was over; while the Porcupine, with many thanks

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for itself and its master, backed respectfully out of the great bird's presence.

"Alas! alas!" said the Prince, in deep gloom. "We shall never rescue the Princess and her father, and get the treasure."

"Don't be too sure of that," said the Porcupine, its eyes twinkling, "for I have an idea. And now follow me;" and after another long walk through the woodland, it stopped before a small hut, half hidden in the dense foliage of the trees.

Here the Prince knocked, and a poor woman, opening the door, fell upon her knees as soon as she saw her visitor, for she recognized him at once as the ruler of that part of the country. The Prince raised her kindly, and asked if she would shelter him and his friend the Porcupine for the night.

"Willingly, your Highness," answered the woman, "but I fear that you will find but little comfort here;" and she led the way into the hut, which was almost bare; a bed of straw and another in the attic, a bench, and an iron kettle being the chief furnishings, while a half-

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opened cupboard showed a well-nigh empty larder.

However the poor woman did her best, and made a pease porridge which the hungry Prince thought very good, and which caused the Porcupine to smack its lips loudly with delight in a way not usual with people of good table manners. That night they rested ; their hostess in the attic, and Prince and Porcupine as near together as was pleasant on the single bed of straw before the fire.

In the morning a child's voice awoke the pair ; and feeling much refreshed, the royal visitor sprang to his feet to greet the poor woman, who now appeared, leading her only child, a fine lad of four or five years of age, by the hand. He was a bright-faced, merry little urchin, with big, wondering grave eyes and hair like spun flax, and he laughed aloud with delight when the Prince tossed him up on his shoulder and pretended to chase the Porcupine, who for an animal of its prickly tendencies entered very well into the spirit of the fun.

Breakfast was a rather spare meal, and the small

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boy looked wistfully several times into the bottom of his mug, evidently hoping that by some lucky chance the milk would come again to fill it. Seeing this, the Porcupine whispered to its master, and the Prince, leaning forward, asked the poor woman if she would lend him her son for a short time, promising in return that no harm should come to him.

Reluctantly the mother agreed, and the three set out at once on their errand, leaving the poor woman watching in her doorway, where she stood till her visitors and her own little lad were alike lost to sight.

When the boy's short legs were tired, the Prince picked him up and carried him pickaback ; and as for the Porcupine, it behaved like the gentleman it was, and was careful to keep its quills entirely to itself.

Thus they journeyed on, and at last reached the spot where the glittering gold and jewels were spread, and where the poor statues surrounding it looked out with gloomy eyes upon them.

“Which would you rather have,” asked the

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Prince, in trembling tones, of the little lad,—
“all this fine treasure or a big bowl of bread
and milk ? ”

“ Bread and milk ! bread and milk ! ” cried
the sweet, shrill voice ; and the small boy danced
up and down on his sturdy legs at the very
idea of such a feast.

“ Run then, dear child,” said the Prince, “ and
touch each one of those stone statues, and last
of all the treasure, and you shall have such
a dinner as you have never seen.”

Thinking this a new kind of game, the boy
at once obeyed ; and his clear laughter echoed
through the forest, as the enchanted men and
women slowly returned to life ; the old King at
once trying to draw his torn mantle about him
with fingers still stiff from the working of the spell,
while the Princess Rosalinda threw herself upon
her royal parent’s breast in an outburst of grati-
tude and delight.

The other people stood about, dazed from their
terrible experience, now happily over ; and the
Prince, coming forward, told all to take an equal
share of the treasure,— the old Monarch’s por-

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tion being quite sufficient to make him rich for life.

"My own part shall be given to this dear, brave little boy, who has saved you all," continued the Prince.

"And mine," said the Porcupine, "I shall leave here, and get a quillful of gold or gems whenever it seems most convenient."

Everybody, therefore, was perfectly satisfied; and the poor woman—poor no longer now—was not the least so when her child was returned to her safe and sound, while the news which her royal master brought with him of her changed fortune seemed almost too good to be true.

There only remained, therefore, to celebrate the marriage of Rosalinda and her gallant bridegroom, and the festivities on this occasion were such that nobody could take the least exception to anything, and even the haughty footmen's eyes stuck out with wonder at the remarkable elegance of it all. The Queen had an amazing milliner's bill, and the Court Jeweller almost ran his legs off in his efforts to keep up with the royal summons.

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As for the Porcupine, immediately after the wedding ceremony, it was knighted, and being now a titled person, of vast wealth, as was whispered, and first Court favorite, it was much looked up to and respected by those of both high and low degree.

A little later the Prince ordered a statue of his friend erected in the public square before the Palace, and in its shadow the nurses used to take their young charges and tell them the story of the faithful Porcupine's adventures.

As for the little lad to whom the Prince had promised a dinner the like of which he had never seen, I can only say that the royal word was not broken, and that the poor woman's small son sat down in a clean pinafore to a meal which began with the big bowl of bread and milk, went on to buttered toast, broiled chicken, and so forth, and ended with apple tart, ice cream, raisins, chocolates, taffy, marmalade, and sweet-meats of all kinds in such profusion that it was the greatest wonder of all the wonderful things that had happened since the beginning of the

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Prince's adventures, that the feast did not immediately finish him.

As it was, however, he didn't have even so much as a teeny weeny pain in his small stomach; and when he had really done and had slipped down from the royal table, you should have seen the beautiful toys that had been provided for his entertainment. In fact, he went home to his mother that night with a large stuffed cat under one arm and a box of soldiers under the other, while about his neck hung a bag of marbles and another of candy, and on his head he proudly wore a fireman's helmet; while behind him strode the very strongest and biggest porter in all the royal service, bearing a whole toy-shop beside and smiling from ear to ear as he did so.

At this happy moment, therefore, let us leave him, and leave the Prince and Princess as well, feeling sure that in that particular kingdom all must of necessity go smoothly, since had they not for true friend and constant adviser the wise and faithful Porcupine.



VI

AVALON AND THE WIND WITCH

THREE was mourning and wailing, terror, too, and confusion in the Palace of the King of the Thousand Isles. The Maids-of-Honor ran helplessly hither and thither, the gray-bearded Councillors shook their heads sadly, the Common People gathered in a dense and excited crowd without the royal precincts, while within the King himself stormed furiously, the Queen wrung her hands, and the Princess wept.

The night before all had been calm and peaceful. After the royal dinner the King had played

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whist with the Queen, had won twopence as usual (she got it back from the Lord Treasurer next day), and in high good humor had gone to bed. The Queen had interviewed the Head Gardener, had told him the cabbages sent to the royal table must in future be fresher, and with a good conscience had retired also.

The Princess Honeydew, their only daughter, had played on her harp awhile, gazed from her balcony at the silver moon, sighed once as she thought of the handsome Prince Avalon, heir to the neighboring kingdom, wished they might meet again, and, having written a note to the Royal Dressmaker to say for the last time that the pink ball gown *must* be done by Thursday, had also sought her chamber for the night.

The First Lady-in-Waiting blew out the scented taper by the Princess's bedside, the Head Candle-Snuffer went his rounds and extinguished the remaining lights in the Palace, gentle snores proceeded from the apartments of the King and his amiable consort; save for this and the regular tramp of the sentinels, all was

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quiet. And yet some time during that very night this terrible thing had happened.

A shriek from the First Lady-in-Waiting, when she came to rouse the Princess, had been the herald of the misfortune, and another from the Princess as her eye caught her reflection in the mirror had been the second note in the general chorus of lamentation.

Would you believe it? The royal maid had gone to bed with her shimmering wealth of golden hair untouched, and now in the morning not a single curl remained! Yes, every shining tress had been wickedly cut. The question remained — who was the thief and when had the deed been done?

The King was purple with fury. He began by ordering the entire Palace guard to instant execution; but the Queen, as was her habit (a rather trying one for his Majesty), revoked the sentence before anything further had been done about it.

Then the King dismissed all the Ladies-in-Waiting without their week's notice, but the Queen at once secretly re-engaged them.

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And lastly, his Majesty issued a proclamation, offering to reward with half his kingdom and the hand of his daughter the one who would secure the punishment of the thief and bring back the Princess's golden locks. And this time the wise Queen did nothing, for she thought it would be plenty of season to move in the matter when the moment for the reward should come. It might be a well-to-do young man of family and prospects who should succeed, and it might not; she would wait and see.

As for the poor shorn Princess, she declared she was a fright, which really wasn't so, for without her long golden tresses she was still fair as a May morning, and the tiny curls peeping out beneath her cap, for she took to caps immediately, were still the envy of the other ladies at Court.

But you could n't induce the Princess to think so. She shut herself up in an ivory tower that her father had formerly built for her near the royal palace. She refused to see any one but her maid and her family, and cried most of the time when she saw them; and when the First

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Lady-in-Waiting besought her to grant an interview to Prince Avalon, who had hurried over on hearing the sad news, the Princess came so near hysterics that the Court Physician forbade any further mention of the subject.

His Majesty was at his wits' end, for his daughter was the apple of his eye. Without much hope, but to relieve his mind, he wrote a postscript to his first declaration, in which a handsome fortune was promised to any one inventing a salve that should make the Princess's hair grow to its former length within a year. After that there was but little peace for any of the royal household, I can tell you. The Head Doorkeeper resigned his post in a week, so many applicants flocked to the Palace; the Postmaster General requested a raise of salary, on the ground of alarming increase in mail; and the King's Private Secretary had nervous prostration.

The Princess had brightened a little on reading some of the first testimonials of the hair-restorers, but her faith soon waned, her interest vanished, and with it went the King's patience, so that the next needy inventor had a narrow

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shave, for the Queen was only in time to save him as the head-man led him to the block.

No more applicants appeared after that, but a note written on heart-shaped paper and decorated with forget-me-nots did come to the Princess, and in it Prince Avalon bade her good-bye, and told her that he was about to set forth on the quest that was, if fortune favored, to end in the capture of the thief and the finding of the golden tresses.

Now at this her Highness wept harder than ever. Nobody knows, indeed, what might have happened, for the First Lady-in-Waiting was already holding salts to her mistress's little pink nose, when suddenly the window flew open and in came the Princess's Fairy Godmother.

"Hoity toity!" said she, taking in the scene with her small, snapping black eyes. "Stop that nonsense at once, child!" and she rapped the ground smartly with her staff. "First you cry because your curls are gone and Avalon doesn't come, then you cry because he comes and you won't see him, and now you cry because he's gone to do you a service."

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“But I fear he’ll get hurt, and n-n-never come back,” sobbed the Princess, but beginning for all that to wipe her eyes with a scrap of lace handkerchief; for, to tell you a secret, the Fairy Godmother was the only person in the world who knew how to manage her Highness, and the only person, too, of whom the young lady was in the least afraid.

“Fiddlesticks!” snapped the Fairy Godmother; “as if I hadn’t watched over Avalon from his cradle. I’ll tell you one thing, however, my girl, he did n’t start in on this harum-scarum errand with my advice; but now he’s off, I’ll wager my snuff-box to your cap-string that he comes back safe again. And speaking of caps, don’t let me see you in one again. Stop all this crying and behave yourself, too, and begin to learn something useful, or when Avalon comes back I’ll see to it that he looks farther for a Princess.”

“He would n’t—you could n’t,” cried Honeydew, her cheeks crimson; but the Fairy Godmother only smiled wisely.

“I think that will settle it,” she said to her-

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self, and tapped with her crutch on the window-pane. "Good-bye, my child," she added more kindly, as she stepped into her flying chariot and without more ado was off about her business.

What this was it will take a little time to tell you, for I must go back to the time when the news of Honeydew's loss first reached Prince Avalon.

Of course, being a young man of spirit, as well as deeply in love with the Princess, he could hardly wait to have his horse saddled before setting forth in quest of the golden locks. But being also a youth of some wisdom, he saw in a few moments that haste often makes waste, and that to seek the thief with success, he must first learn something of the direction in which to ride.

Now there was only one person who would and could give him this information, and it was, therefore, towards the abode of a crabbed old Wizard that the royal youth first turned his horse's head.

Now, if the Wizard was crabbed, he had a Housekeeper who was twice as crotchety. She

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lived with her master in the Cavern that was his home, and though she served him faithfully, she was never tired of grumbling at this queer kind of residence. The Wizard let her have things in other matters very much her own way. He *would* live in a Cave, and he *would n't* let her dust his magic pots and kettles or brush the cobwebs from his big iron-bound books; but on the other hand, it was a great honor to be Housekeeper to so wise a person, and the Wizard usually let her say whom to help and whom not to; and she settled the fees in most cases. Thus it was that sometimes money-bags bursting with gold were sent to the Wizard's underground chamber, and sometimes a body would pay little or nothing — a four-leaved clover, perhaps, or a skein of yarn, or some such trifle; for the Housekeeper had a kind heart, with all her cross-grained temper, and she seldom asked people for more than they could give.

Unfortunately for Avalon, however, things had gone wrong the day of his visit, and the door of the Cavern was slammed in his face,

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almost before he had stated his errand. The next day was hardly better. "The Wizard was having a nap and could n't be disturbed ;" and the next, "He was busy turning sand into gold and would n't see visitors." But the Prince was not going to stop trying for a few rebuffs of this kind. He continued to sit patiently before the Magician's door, and at last the Housekeeper grew curious. Surely this was a very determined young man and pleasant spoken, and she liked the way he took off his cap. Perhaps she would talk with him about the matter.

Well, the upshot was that the Housekeeper told the Wizard that a very worthy young Prince was in trouble ; and Avalon found himself, on the fourth day, in the curious underground chamber of which so many strange things were spoken. He told his story, and the Wizard silently began to brew a magic potion. Great blue clouds of smoke rolled up from the brazen caldron, and the Wizard bade him on his life to keep silence, "else," said he, "will the charm be broken."

And now Avalon saw a wonderful thing.

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The walls of the Cavern chamber seemed to melt away, the smoke wreaths vanished, and in their place the Prince saw the chamber of his lady love. It was evening, and the Princess slept. Then all at once a black mist took shape in the moonlit night without,—a monster winged horseman, and, clutching his shoulders, a Witch with gleaming yellow eyes and straggling gray hair. The Witch alighted at the window-ledge, entered the Princess's room, and hobbling to her couch, cut off with a pair of shears those famous golden locks.

At this sight Avalon forgot the Magician's warning and cried aloud. Instantly, with a clap of thunder, the picture vanished, and the Prince stood amazed in the angry Wizard's presence. Nor would the wise man listen to the Prince's plea for pardon, but packed him off without further help, except a chance word, by which Avalon learned that his enemy was the famous Witch of the Winds, and that she had ridden on her wicked errand upon the shoulders of North Wind, her eldest son.

Much disheartened at his own foolishness,

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Avalon rode sadly away, first to bid farewell to his Princess and then to set forth in search of the Witch's home.

After learning that Honeydew would not receive him and having sent her a parting note, he took the first road that opened before him, and there on a grassy hillock near the highway sat the Fairy Godmother. She began at once by rebuking the Prince for his folly in starting upon so perilous an adventure, and then went on to bid him be of good cheer, for she would aid him. Even with all her help it might prove too hard a nut for him to crack, — the Wind Witch was a very powerful as well as wicked person, — yet it was full time that her evil deeds ceased ; and poor little Honeydew was a good child, after all, and should have back her golden curls if the Fairy Godmother could compass it.

"Keep a brave heart, Avalon," said she. "I saved you at the age of three from an attack of croup, and you were in as much danger then as now. Perhaps I may save you a second time. At any rate, here are three gifts and a piece of advice. Turn your horse loose. Take off that

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fine coat; change yourself into a beggar boy, and wait here till nightfall. I have reason to think that the Witch of the Winds wants a servant and that she will seek one here. Go with her, and good luck be with you." So saying, the Fairy Godmother vanished, and the Prince proceeded at once to follow her instructions.

This was easy to do, for he was not long in finding a wayfarer who was willing enough to change his ragged suit for the gold-embroidered satin and fine linen of the Prince's garments, and a little earth and water well rubbed on the skin did the rest.

Then the Prince untied the cord about the package that the Fairy Godmother had given him, and took out, first, a plain gold ring; second, a bottle of oil; and lastly, a silver lute. A scrap of paper fluttered to the ground as he did so, and picking it up he read the following verse:—

"Bind with this ring the leader's nose.
The oil rub on from crown to toes.
Play thou the lute to list'ning foes."

"It certainly sounds like nonsense," said the Prince to himself, "and I haven't the least idea

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what it means ; ” but nevertheless he slipped the paper into his pocket and sat down to wait for nightfall.

Sure enough, just as the shadows deepened, the Witch appeared. She was wrapped in a long dark mantle with a hood over her head, but Avalon would have known her anywhere by her shining yellow eyes.

She stopped when she saw the Prince and asked him if he would like to come with her. “ You seem a smart, likely lad,” said she, “ and I pay good wages. Will you engage with me for long service or for short service ? ”

“ What is the difference ? ” asked the Prince.

“ Long service,” answered the Witch, “ is for a year and a day, just common work, in house and stable. At the end of the time I ’ ll give you a golden penny. Short service is for three days only. You must do all that I demand. If you succeed in your tasks, you may ask for what you like and I must do as you wish. If you fail, your head shall pay the forfeit.”

“ Well,” said the Prince boldly, for he could not bear to think of leaving his Princess for

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a moment longer than needful, "I'll take the short service."

At this the eyes of the Wind Witch gleamed bright, and she chuckled hoarsely. Then pulling out a broomstick from beneath her cloak, she bade Avalon seat himself upon it, sprang upon it herself, and in an instant the Prince found himself flying through the air with the speed of an arrow shot from the bow.

The Witch of the Winds had her dwelling in a Castle surrounded by a barren plain, strewn thick with rocks, perched on the very summit of a steep mountain. In the great Hall of this abode the broomstick came to earth, and the Prince dismounted, feeling still a trifle dizzy from his airy flight.

"My sons are not yet home," said the Witch in her harsh voice. "You may lie in that corner to-night, and in yonder cupboard you will find a loaf of black bread and a pitcher of water. To-morrow your service begins: you are to drive my herd of pigs to pasture, and mind you come back without one missing, or your head shall answer for it."

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So saying, his new mistress departed, and Avalon, rolling up his cloak for a pillow, sought the corner the Witch had pointed out and was soon fast asleep.

At midnight a terrible roaring wakened him, and the noise of falling chairs and tables. Then the massive furniture of the Hall itself began to dance as if bewitched. It grew suddenly very cold, the door of the Hall burst open, and in rushed the Witch's eldest son, North Wind himself, his great black mantle blowing in swirling folds behind him. Hardly had he entered when the air grew milder, and a handsome youth, crowned with flowers, danced gayly into the great Hall; this was South Wind, and he was closely followed by his two remaining brothers, West Wind and East Wind.

They took no notice of Avalon in his corner, but began to talk of their doings. North Wind had sunk a ship that day; South Wind had torn up the flowers in the Queen's garden bed in a mischievous frolic; West Wind had quarrelled with East Wind, and between them they had made quite enough trouble. All this the Prince

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heard, and he was not sorry, I can tell you, when South Wind went yawning off to bed, his brothers soon following his example.

By daybreak the four sons of the Witch had gone again from home; and their mother calling Avalon gave him charge of a huge herd of pigs, that began at once to scatter in every direction.

The poor Prince had his hands full, as he chased the swine over their stony pasture, now beating up the laggards and now turning back the foremost. Do what he might, however, he soon found that he could not keep his charges together. They would stray away, and even now some had gone out of sight and hearing. His blood ran cold as he thought of the cruel joy of his wicked mistress should he return unsuccessful in her service, and his head felt very loose on his shoulders.

All at once his heart gave a leap, for the first line of the Fairy Godmother's verse came to his mind and gave him new courage.

“Bind with this ring the leader’s nose.”

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The Prince felt in his pocket; he had the ring right enough, but where was the leader? For the enormous hog that had headed the herd had disappeared, and so had most of his remaining charges.

The Prince started up, and to his joy now beheld the fat old fellow rooting for acorns at some distance. There then began a lively chase, and it was only after a vast amount of dodging and scrambling that the panting swineherd at last seized his slippery pig-ship by the tail. In the twinkling of an eye the ring was slipped over his long snout, and every pig seemed to obey some mysterious call, for they came trooping up at once and surrounded their leader, whom, by the way, the Prince held fast by the ear.

After this it was an easy matter to obey the old Witch's demands, and when evening came, Avalon went boldly back to the Castle, where his new mistress counted the herd twice over, and then grudgingly told him that as none of his charge was lost, he might sleep again in the corner of the great Hall, and make his supper, as before, of the black bread in the cupboard.

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The next day the Witch called the Prince to her, and told him that there was no work for him that day. "At night," said she, "you shall wrestle with one of my sons, and if you do not succeed in throwing him you shall surely die."

Avalon was heavy-hearted enough at this, you may be sure; but again the Fairy Godmother's verse popped into his mind, and, as it directed, he carefully rubbed himself all over, from head to foot, with the oil that she had given him.

In came at evening the boisterous four, and they roared with laughter at the thought of a puny human being matching his strength with theirs. Avalon remained silent as they flung their taunts and jeers at him, and at last they began to throw lots to see who should be the one to obey their wicked mother and wrestle with the stranger.

West Wind won the toss, and stripping himself for the contest, bade Avalon stand forth. And then began a wonderful wrestling-match indeed. The mighty muscles stood out on West Wind's arms and shoulders, and he could have broken the Prince in two as a child breaks a

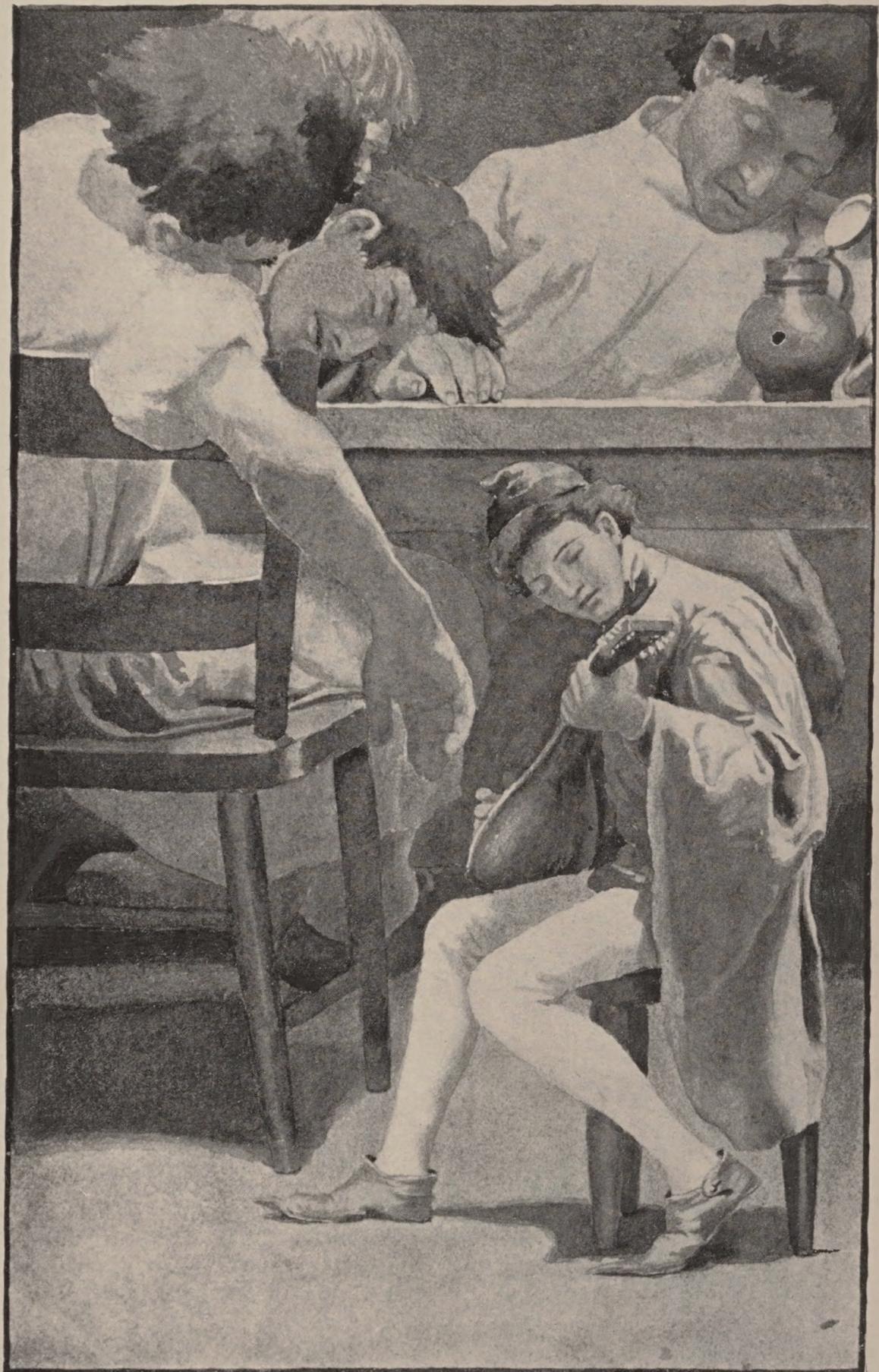
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twig, could he have once held him long enough for a firm grip. But the magic oil made Avalon as supple as an eel; again and again he slipped through West Wind's fingers, and at last, by a lucky turn, he tripped up his huge enemy, and with a crash like a falling oak down came West Wind on the stone floor of the Castle Hall.

The Witch's eyes glowed like two hot coals, and her face was hideous with anger, as she bade Avalon get to his corner, which the Prince was only too glad to do without a second bidding.

The next day the four brothers stayed at home, and when the Prince went to seek the Witch for further orders, she was nowhere to be found. He came back to the great Hall, therefore, where the Wind brethren were lounging; and this time he had his silver lute, for he remembered the third line of the magic verse. It had served him well before, and he would not fail to obey its behest this time also, for who knew what trap lay waiting him?

So he began gently to play, and after the first few notes South Wind began to nod, then East Wind stretched himself and yawned, West Wind



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closed his eyes, and North Wind lay back in his chair and was soon snoring. The Prince played on and on, until at length the four brothers were indeed fast asleep.

Then he stole noiselessly from the Hall and started to explore the Castle. Through room after room he quickly sped, nor stopped to look closer at the treasure that strewed the floor, or at the curious objects that everywhere met his eye.

At last he entered a chamber smaller than any of the rest, and there by the casement window, sitting with her back to the door by which he had entered, Avalon beheld a maiden. Yes, and more than this, for the lady's golden curls fell nearly to her feet, — such shimmering golden curls as the Prince had seen in happier days, and then they had adorned the loveliest face in twenty kingdoms.

“ Honeydew ! ” cried Avalon, forgetting all else, “ how came you here ? ” and he reached the maiden in a single stride. Another instant and the trick was plain, and the Prince had snatched the shining tresses from their place,

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leaving bald and bare the wooden figure that the Witch had made to trap him.

"And trapped you are!" croaked a voice behind him; and there stood the wicked creature herself, grinning with malicious triumph. "Come, Sons of the Wind!" she screamed, clutching him with her bony hand as she called; "kill the thief who steals the Wind Witch's treasure!"

Avalon saw that there was no time to be lost, for the shrill voice echoed through the Castle, and any moment now the four brothers might awake. The silver lute, however, had gained him an instant and he used it well. With a quick motion he flung his mantle about the Witch's head, and held her fast, despite her shrieks and struggles. But now he heard in the distance the steps of the running Wind brothers.

He looked about him in despair. There was no place to hide in that bare chamber—but see! what was that? The Witch's broomstick caught his eye. If it had flown with him before, why not now and if it needed a witch to make it go, why, the Witch should come along.

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So, grasping fast his struggling prisoner with one hand, and holding tight the Princess's stolen curls, Avalon flung himself on the broomstick, and calling aloud, "Quick, to the Wizard's Cave!" hung tight, as with a jump, straight out the casement window, sped the strange steed, just as the Wind brothers broke into the adjoining chamber.

So fast they flew that Avalon clung for his life, as the miles raced away behind them. On and on, without whip or spur and straight to the mark. Luckily the Wizard's door was open. The Housekeeper threw up her hands in horror, as they passed within, but without stop or stay the broomstick sped its course until it landed gently at the feet of the Wizard himself.

Then the Housekeeper began to scold: "Such carryings-on were enough to turn a body's hair gray;" and the Prince, for once in his life interrupting a lady, told of his narrow escape and begged for help.

When the Wizard found that this tattered young man was the Prince who had come to him but a short three days gone by, and that

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the struggling, fighting thing bound up in the mantle was the fierce and powerful Wind Witch, captured by this same youth, and that the golden locks were *the* famous stolen curls of the Princess Honeydew, he pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and stared in mild surprise, not unmixed with admiration.

In fact, he even went so far as to offer to take Avalon as apprentice; and when the Prince respectfully declined, the Wizard, though sorry, was not offended, and at Avalon's urgent, repeated request, by the aid of his most powerful charm from his biggest book of magic, turned the Wind Witch into a black cat, and threw the broomstick into the furnace, which, being used principally in gold melting, was very hot indeed.

The rest of my story is not hard to tell. But I wish you could have been there to see the wedding of Avalon and the Princess, who, by the way, wore a wig of her own recaptured curls, so skilfully constructed that not even the First Lady-in-Waiting, who was skilled in such matters, would believe it was not the Princess's own hair, magically grown on again.

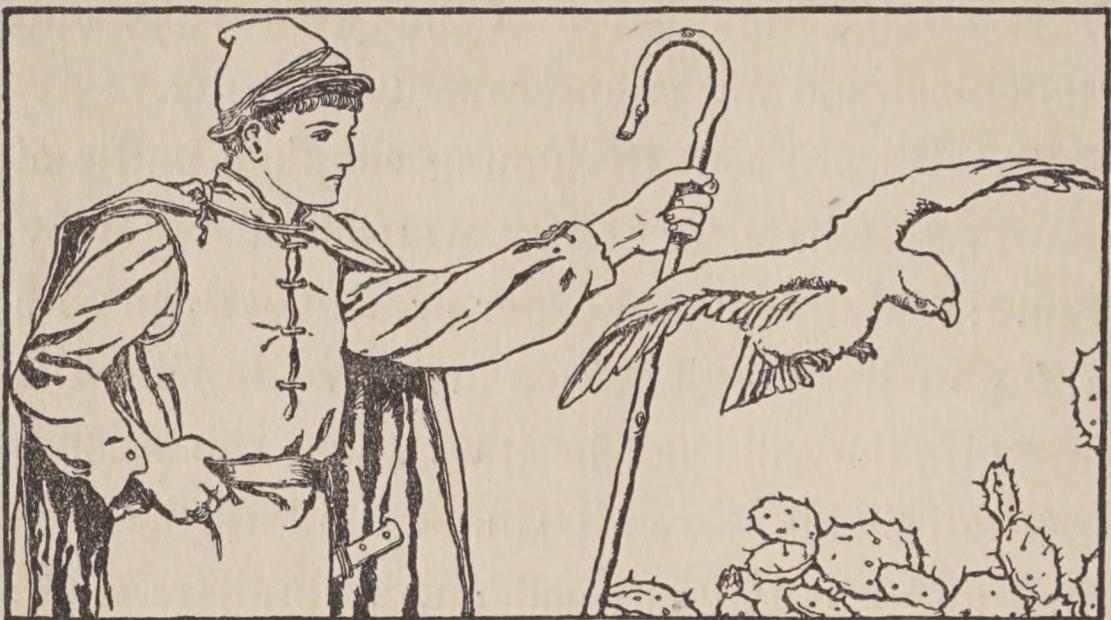
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The King doubled everybody's salary, and the Queen did not countermand the order.

The Wizard sent the young couple a bottle of his best Elixir of Life, warranted for fifty years; and the Housekeeper presented them with a jar of her finest mince-meat; so having the first gift, they did not hesitate to use the second.

The schools were all shut up till further notice, and gilt gingerbread and Gibraltars could be had for the asking.

Everybody said that never had they seen so handsome and brave a Prince, or so beautiful and sweet a Princess ; and as for the Fairy Godmother, I have been told — and I think it true — she threw away her crutch and danced at the wedding.



VII

THE QUEEN OF THE SEVEN MOUNTAINS

ONCE upon a time, long, long ago, there lived a Queen named Vera, who was at once so good and so beautiful that she was loved by everybody in her whole kingdom, from the highest official of the Court down to the poorest little match-boy who earned his humble living in the streets of her Majesty's city.

Queen Vera's dominions were encircled by seven mighty mountains, so steep and rugged

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as to quite shut out the world beyond, but encompassing a green and fruitful valley, in the very centre of which the royal Palace stood. This was built of the purest alabaster, the doors and windows framed in mother-of-pearl and the roof itself of shining silver. From the foremost turret the royal standard floated,—a blue flag bearing a white dragon, with the words, “I rule by kindness,”—the Queen’s motto.

All about the Palace stretched a lovely garden, and without were rows and rows of magnificent houses and wide streets shaded by cocoanut and palm trees. Even the homes of the very poor people on the city’s outskirts were neat and pretty red-roofed cottages; and then miles of green meadow and farm-land, with fruit orchards which bore at all seasons of the year not only pears, apples, and cherries, but oranges, figs, and lemons as well,—these last in the valley itself and the harder fruit on the mountain side.

There were, indeed, one or two people who were sometimes a little discontented. The Lord High Treasurer thought the Queen should be more careful about remitting the taxes, and the

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Head Prison Inspector almost never found any prisoners to inspect, and the Commander-in-Chief of the royal forces had to content himself with sham battles, for no enemy ever ventured to climb those terrible mountains that guarded the Queen's dominions. The School Committee also sometimes thought there were too many holidays, but I never heard that the children felt badly about it; yet, however that may be, it is quite true that on the great feast of the year, the Queen's birthday, there was not a soul in the whole kingdom but what was quite ready and willing to rejoice and enjoy the good things provided to the utmost.

It was Vera's custom on this holiday not to receive presents herself, but to give something very nice indeed to every one of her subjects. For weeks beforehand spies had been set to work to listen and hear what people wanted. As they always wore the royal livery, it was quite easy for everybody to know them and to say what they most wished for in a loud voice at the proper time and place; and this plan worked so well that the Queen had little

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trouble in making out her list of gifts for the occasion.

There was but one reason in the world why things should not have gone on forever in this same happy fashion, and that was that in some mysterious way word reached a wicked old Witch of this beautiful and peaceful kingdom, where everybody was content and where nobody so much as ever had a cold in the head, so healthful was the climate. Perhaps a wandering bird told her ; perhaps she had a magic glass in which the kingdoms of the world might be seen ; how it happened I cannot tell, I only know that it did happen, and that the very thought of so much peace and plenty threw Viperena (for that was the Witch's name) in a very frenzy of rage and malice.

She at once ordered her flying Bat to be instantly saddled, and it happened that she reached Vera's Palace just as the doors of the Audience Room were thrown open that the Queen might receive the birthday greetings of her loving and loyal subjects.

The Lord High Chancellor had begun his

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yearly address, of which he was very proud, for it was always so full of learned words that nobody but himself could understand it, and had just got to “the illustrious benevolence of your munificent hospitality,” — for he used quite simple language in the beginning, — when a hoarse, croaking voice bade him “Cease!” and there stood Viperena, glowering and grinning in a way quite too horrible to describe. The people fell back, and a baby in the crowd began to cry; the Lord High Chancellor got very red in the face, and the nearest thing to a frown that had ever been seen there clouded her Majesty’s smooth forehead.

“What means this?” Vera asked, her silvery voice stern, for she did not like to see her friends and subjects thus huddled together like a flock of frightened sheep.

“What it means you ’ll know all too soon, my fine lady,” jeered the hag. “It means that all this silly feasting and merry-making has come to an end.” She raised her crutch as she spoke and pointed it at the Queen, rapidly muttering a magic charm under her breath as

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she did so. Vera's beautiful eyes slowly closed, her face grew white, and her lovely head fell back on the cushions of the throne. Viperena watched her with the cold, unwinking, cruel gaze of a snake about to destroy a bird.

Then the Witch again spoke, and mounted her Bat as she did so. Straight upward she flew, and at the same instant Palace, mansion and cottage, pleasant meadow and royal park, farm and garden, alike disappeared beneath a torrent of water, that rose and rose till finally all was hidden beneath the flood ; and instead of a smiling valley encircled by seven great mountains, there appeared the quiet surface of a lake, in which these same giant heights were mirrored.

From the centre of this vast expanse slowly rose a splendid water-lily, which held within its silver cup what seemed to be a bubble — such as children blow from pipes, only many, many times larger than any little earth child has ever made, and many times more lasting. Golden hues, purple and rose and the blue of the skies above — all these tints and delicate colors played over its

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surface ; and within, fast locked in magic slumber, reposed Vera the Queen.

The Common People Viperena had changed by her arts into the shape of frogs ; the Courtiers were now gold and silver fish, and some of them were eels ; the Maids-of-Honor she had turned into swans, and they now floated gracefully about on the surface of the lake ; while below in its blue depths might still be seen the Palace and, indeed, the whole city and country-side : the fish courtiers swimming in and out through the open doors and windows of the houses, the frog people croaking out their horror and surprise on the edge of the lake itself.

Viperena, feeling very well pleased with her day's work, had gone off chuckling, as we have seen. She believed that not a single soul had escaped ; but in this, as you will soon find, she was mistaken.

A young shepherd, named Chrystal, had been, at the time of the Witch's visit, high up on the side of one of the seven mountains. The night before he had spent in watching over a sick lamb, and feeling tired, he had sought this lonely spot

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in order to snatch, if possible, a few hours' repose. He had slept, therefore, through all these happenings ; and when he awoke he could hardly believe his senses, for there at his feet was a lake that he had never seen before, while the familiar plain, the Palace and surroundings, his own humble cottage, all, all alike had vanished.

Chrystal sprang to his feet, and as he did so, a confused babble of laughter, weeping, singing, and brief bits of curious talk came to his ears. He stopped, looked about, and could see nothing ; but still the thing went on, and at last came calls for help.

The shepherd, now quite awake, ran quickly in the direction from which the cries proceeded, and at length, guided by the sound, stumbled upon an opening in the underbrush where a parrot struggled, caught fast by one wing in a trap. Now we all know that parrots can talk, and that some can talk very well indeed, but I think one would hardly expect any bird to converse as sensibly as did this one ; for, the instant it clapped eyes upon Chrystal, it said in clear, crisp tones and just a little impatiently, —

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"Come, come, my good lad! Don't stand there staring, but get me out of this trap as soon as possible. And take care now; don't, for the world, let anything happen to my two crimson tail-feathers."

"I'll try," said the shepherd humbly, just as he would have answered a person; and he accordingly loosened the spring of the trap, and in a few moments the parrot was free. One wing, however, had been hurt, and Chrystal, who was very kind-hearted, placed the bird on his shoulder and was about to offer to take him home and bind up the injured member, when it suddenly came to the shepherd's mind that now, alas! he had no home to which he could go.

"I know," said the parrot, as if in answer to the unspoken thought. "I know all about it. Poor lad!" and in a few words he told the youth all that had occurred during his brief slumber. "I hate Viperena," he continued. "She has done friends of mine many a bad turn before, and you to-day have done me a good one. I know you love your Queen. Do you

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not wish to rescue her and all these kind neighbours of yours as well?"

"If I only might!" answered Chrystal, his eyes bright with hope. "I would risk my life a thousand times if I could but save the Lady Vera and give her back her kingdom."

"Well," said the parrot, "to do so will be no easy matter, but I will help you as far as I can. Perhaps you have noticed," he went on, "that I am no ordinary bird. In fact, I belonged for years to the powerful Wizard Alderbarino. From him I learned much, and his store of treasure I will show you. There are, however, but three things there that will be of use to you in your task, and you must depend on your wit and courage and upon my wisdom for the rest. To-night let us feed on the fruits of this orchard on the mountain side and let us sleep. To-morrow I will guide you to Alderbarino's store-house."

To this the shepherd agreed, and the next morning the parrot, who was still too lame to fly, perched upon Chrystal's shoulder and directed his steps. The mountains had always

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been thought impassable; but the wise bird knew of a foot-path that, though often narrow and perilous, could still be traversed, and it was over this dangerous road that the shepherd journeyed.

The Wizard's treasure lay hid in the desert that encircled the other side of the seven mountains. By the parrot's advice Chrystal filled his drinking-flask with water from a running brook and his pockets with fruit, and thus laden he at length reached the end of the first stage of the journey.

"At sunrise I will show you the treasure," said the parrot; and at sunrise he was as good as his word, for he flew straight as a dart to a big bunch of prickly cactus that concealed an iron ring that lay in the sand of the desert.

The shepherd at once obeyed the further command to pull on this with all his might, and succeeded in lifting up a flat stone that covered a flight of steps leading downward. These Chrystal descended, and found himself in a cavern hollowed out of rock and lit with many colored lamps. The parrot hopped on briskly

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before him, and the shepherd did not linger over the great heaps of gold, silver, gems, and precious stuffs that were strewn carelessly about on every side.

“ My Master is long since dead,” said the parrot, “ and no one claims his wealth. Were he present he would give freely of his store. Take then this dagger, this scroll, and this bunch of herbs. With the first you can prick the magic bubble, the prison of your Queen ; with the potent words written on the second you can turn yourself into a white mouse with ruby eyes ; and lastly, a mouthful of these herbs will change you back to your proper shape once more.”

Then the parrot told the shepherd what further he must do ; and Chrystal, having thanked him warmly, again ascended the winding stair, replaced the stone, and proceeded on his way, the friendly bird sometimes perched on his shoulder and sometimes flying slowly before him.

By and by they came to a town ; and here Chrystal took his stand in the open market-place, and sang so sweetly that a crowd had soon gathered about him. When he had finished he

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gave his cap to the parrot, who took it in his beak and hopped gravely about from one person to another; and this pleased the bystanders as much as the singing had done, so that coppers and even silver coins fell thick and fast into the cap. In this manner the two travelling companions were able to pay their way at the inns where they stopped, and all the time they were drawing nearer to the Witch's abode.

At last one evening about dusk they reached it,—a grim old Castle enough, but very comfortable within, for Viperena always gave herself the best of everything. Chrystal made his way to the kitchen, and was soon on friendly terms with the Cook, while the parrot flew straight up to the Witch's chamber, and there did so many curious tricks and recited poetry so prettily that the wicked sorceress took quite a fancy to the bird, and bade her attendants bring in a golden perch for him to stand upon, and the choicest of hemp seed and other fine things for him to eat.

That night, as had been arranged, Chrystal changed himself into a white mouse with ruby eyes, and when Viperena was asleep he crept up

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on her bed and bit her on the toe. At this the parrot screamed loudly, "Thieves! thieves!" and the startled Witch sprang across the room at a bound, and seized her most precious belonging, her book of magic, from its secret hiding-place, while the white mouse scuttled into a hole and escaped.

Now this was just what the parrot wished, for he wanted to learn the whereabouts of Viperena's written spells, since it was one of these which had caused the ruin of the Queen of the Seven Mountains; and to undo the mischief it was necessary to repeat the magic words backward. During the next day the parrot tried to open the book when the Witch's back was turned, but the clasp refused to move for all his efforts.

So that night the white mouse crept in as before and bit the slumbering Viperena on the finger. Waking in a rage and seeing the culprit, the Witch screamed and threw the magic book at the small creature. It missed by the tiniest part of an inch, and hit the ground so hard that the clasp flew open,—a thing which, fortunately, Viperena never noticed, though she

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kept the book so closely with her that the parrot had no chance to look within its covers.

The third night the wily old hag hid her big black cat in the room, and when at dawn the white mouse came softly in and bit the Witch on the nose, the cat sprang out at him, and I fear that poor Chrystal's last moment would have come then and there, if the parrot with great courage and presence of mind had not instantly flung himself on the cat and buffeted him so fiercely that the mouse was able a third time to plunge down a convenient hole and so escape.

Without losing a moment the parrot seized the magic book, which during all this excitement was lying forgotten on the table, and flew out of the window; when he was joined immediately by the shepherd, who had meantime eaten of the Wizard's herbs and had so regained his proper shape.

Quickly they fled through the lightening dusk to a spot where the wise bird knew help and safety awaited them. Viperena would soon discover her loss, and then woe betide the culprits

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if once within her clutches. So without pause they hastened onward, and at last, with a sigh of relief, the bird pointed with his claw to a circle of ancient trees, from within which sounded a tremendous chattering and commotion.

“The King of the Parrots holds court in yonder grove,” said he; and Chrystal, following close, was soon in the royal presence.

Here parrots of all colors and sizes met his wondering eyes, and perched on a massive limb above the rest in solitary grandeur, the shepherd beheld the head of the flock, the most illustrious and ancient of them all. To this superior being Chrystal’s guide did reverence, and, silence having fallen on the Court, he told his story.

“My wisdom, most dread Sovereign, is not sufficient for the task,” said the bird in conclusion. “Here is the Witch’s book, but I would beseech your Majesty to point out the particular charm that Viperena has used to work her wicked will on Vera, the Queen of the Seven Mountains, that this young man may undo the spell by reciting it backward.”

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"Will you give in return your left crimson tail-feather?" asked the King.

The parrot hesitated, but the shepherd's pleading eyes were fixed upon him, and after a moment's silent struggle he at last consented; whereupon the aged Monarch gravely marked with his beak a line or two of black,—curiously formed characters, which Chrystal immediately learned by heart, being careful, however, always to begin at the last letter and so on to the first.

He had hardly fixed the magic words firmly in his mind, however, when a dark cloud overspread the sky, lightning blazed in the heavens, and a deafening peal of thunder rent the air, while on the instant down from above swooped the Bat, with Viperena, in a hideous rage, seated upon its back.

Now nobody knows what might have happened had not the parrot with his usual presence of mind called out hurriedly: "Save us! Save us! Lord and Master! Save us, great King, and my right crimson tail-feather shall be yours."

At these words the old Monarch spoke briefly in command, and at his royal order the whole

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flock of parrots rose at once in the air and attacked the wicked Witch with beak and claw. Viperena fought desperately in turn, with tooth and nail, but she could not remember at that moment any of the wicked spells she had learned by heart, and her feathered enemies left her little time for reflection.

At last, thoroughly frightened, the Witch decided to change her form. She would turn herself into a parrot and thus escape among the crowd from her foes; but, as I have said, in the stress and hurry of battle she could not remember part of what she had meant to say, and so, though she succeeded in changing herself into the desired shape, she forgot something very important, for she left the shell of her proper form upon the ground. It was just like the husk of an ear of corn when the corn itself has been taken out, but the parrots knew that if it were destroyed, never, never could Viperena change back again, but must always remain in the shape she had chosen.

So, led by Chrystal's friend, they swooped down upon the empty shell, and with such right

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good-will pecked and clawed away at it that in a few moments nothing but shreds and patches remained, while the real Viperena, with a shriek of despair and anger, vanished in the distance.

The magic book had met in the fray with a like fate, so Chrystal was very glad indeed that he had first learned the charm he had come so many weary miles to seek.

When all was over and the ruffled birds had settled once more within the grove, the parrot, like the gentleman he was, came up without a murmur and plucked out his two cherished crimson tail-feathers and presented them to his King.

"I am but a dull gray thing now, dear Chrystal," he murmured.

"But more beautiful to me than any other living bird," the shepherd answered, as with faltering voice he tried to thank his faithful friend for all his kindness.

Bidding farewell to King and Court, the two now started on their homeward journey; and very happy and contented they were, for they thought that now all their troubles were over,

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and that it only remained to undo the harm that Viperena had wrought, and restore the Queen and her subjects to their former joyful life.

✓But, alas! even the wise parrot was for once mistaken, for he had not fully understood the malice of the Witch, who, if she could do no more harm in person, could and would still try her best to injure Chrystal and his feathered friend and prevent their rescue of the Queen, through the wicked help of another.

So it was that just as the shepherd and his companion neared their journey's end—yes, even in the shadow of the seven mountains—a Giant sprang from behind a massive boulder, and swinging a net, had in an instant the unsuspecting parrot caught fast in its toils. Flourishing a knotty club in the other hand, the monster now advanced upon poor Chrystal, who stood stock still and dumb with surprise at the suddenness and completeness of the attack.

“I’ll kill you first, my fine fellow,” roared the Giant, “and then I’ll wring the neck of that gabbling busybody in the net. I’m up to his tricks, I can tell you, and he’ll have no chance

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to fly in my face and beat me with his wings as he did my poor friend Viperena ; ” and with another flourish of his club the Giant came forward, and Chrystal barely dodged the first terrible blow.

“ Turn into a mouse and escape ! ” shrieked the parrot.

“ And leave you ! Never ! ” answered the youth, stoutly.

“ Then pluck forth quickly your dagger and pierce his heart ! ” cried the bird, flapping his wings up and down in the greatest excitement.

Now it was all very well to say “ Pierce the Giant’s heart ; ” but poor Chrystal could hardly reach as high as the monster’s knee, and besides had his hands full with trying to avoid the rain of blows from the great club, any one of which would have settled the case and forever. It was fortunate indeed that the shepherd was so much smaller than his foe and so very much more nimble, for it was his only chance for life, and had the monster been a trifle less clumsy, my story would now come to a very sad ending.

But Chrystal was quick, and the Giant grew

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more and more angry, and there is nothing like anger, you know, for making one stupid. That, I think, must have been the reason that Viperen-na's friend forgot all about the unevenness of the ground on which he was standing ; at any rate, just as he thought he had at last caught the shepherd, his big foot struck a rock and over he fell, crashing to the earth like an oak that is felled by the wood-cutter.

In an instant the shepherd had flung himself on the heaving chest of his half-stunned enemy and held the dagger poised above his heart.

"This is a magic dagger," the youth said sternly, "and can pierce your tough hide with the greatest ease. Speak ! What will you do if I spare your life ? "

"I will go away and never trouble you again," replied the Giant, now thoroughly cowed, "and I will make you rich for life."

"Leave the country you shall," answered Chrystal, "but as for riches, I can have as much as I care for, since the treasures of the Wizard Alderbarino are mine for the taking."

Now when the Giant heard this potent name

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he was more frightened than ever and began to beg hard for mercy. "I too am something of a magician," he said, "and I'll gladly perform any task that may be within my power."

"Can you change the color of my friend the parrot?" asked the youth.

"Yes, indeed," eagerly replied the Giant, and glad to be let off so easily.

"Then," said the shepherd, "I would have you restore to him two crimson tail-feathers: let them be of length and beauty such as no other bird can boast. Give him as well wings of blue and silver, a yellow breast, and a rose-colored crest tipped with green. Make him shine as the peacock and the humming-bird, and let his claws and bill be henceforth of the purest gold. Release him from the net, humbly beg his forgiveness, and you are free."

All these things the Giant did without delay, and the delight of the parrot may easily be imagined. Chrystal too was very much pleased at the fine appearance which his feathered friend presented; and as for the enemy, he took to his heels without delay, for he felt no desire

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whatever to meddle further with any acquaintance of the Wizard Alderbarino.

The shepherd and the parrot therefore once more peacefully resumed their journey, and after a hard day's climb they reached the top of the mountain and saw again, on the other side, the blue waters of the lake, the lily and its precious freight. In the morning the shepherd made a raft of water rushes woven close together and bound with wood from the mountain's side.

The parrot pretended to help in this work, also, but I must confess that he did on this occasion more talking than working, for he now saw himself for the first time since the wonderful change in his appearance. It was, in fact, hard for the shepherd to keep from laughing, for his friend was so charmed with his mirrored image in the waters of the lake, that he strutted about in quite a foolish fashion, and nobody who saw him then would ever have imagined him to be the wise bird that we have found him.

However, when the raft was done, the parrot became more sensible, and took his familiar place on Chrystral's shoulder, while the shepherd

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rowed toward the centre of the lake. Here he moored his craft to a strong lily-pad, and drawing forth the Wizard's dagger, pricked the bubble that had so long held the lovely Vera captive.

It vanished into space on the instant,—just as your soap bubbles do when you touch them with your finger. Then Chrystal began to recite the magic charm backward, and as he proceeded, the Queen's lovely eyes slowly opened, the waters sank, the lily closed its petals and disappeared, the gold and silver fish began all at once to look less like fish and more like gorgeously dressed men and women, the frogs stopped croaking, the eels ceased to wriggle, and the swans surrounded their waking Queen, their own plumage changing back to gowns of snowy tissue.

At length the shepherd spoke the final word, and there before his eyes was the scene unchanged, just as Viperena had first found it except for his own presence and that of the parrot in the great Audience Hall of the Kingdom of the Seven Mountains. The Lord High Chancellor was going on with his speech, and

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had even said “the munificent hospitality of your illustrious benevolence,” for he was naturally a little mixed, when the Queen’s eye caught the gorgeous plumage of the parrot, and she waved her hand for silence.

As she did so, the memory of Viperena’s visit and its dreadful consequence came back to all, and Chrystal stepping forward knelt before the throne and told his story. While he spoke the Queen’s wonderful eyes grew softer yet and a tender smile played about her mouth, till, when he had finished, a look from her restrained the waiting multitude, eager to welcome their deliverer.

“My lords and gentlemen, and you, ladies of the Court, and faithful subjects, it is meet and fitting that the birthday celebration of your Queen, so rudely and perilously interrupted by the wicked Witch, should now go on with all due pomp and ceremony, and with more than customary merry-making. But for this brave youth, your fate and mine were sealed. To you, then, and to me a gift. To you a King and to me a husband. Rise, Chrystal,—from

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to-day my consort and Ruler of the Kingdom of the Seven Mountains!"

Hardly had the Queen ceased when thunders of applause rose from the listening throng, and even the little children clapped their tiny hands with glee.

With a splendor unknown before to even that rich country was the marriage immediately celebrated, and was followed by the coronation of the once humble shepherd.

As for the parrot, he, as you may well believe, was not forgotten, but waddled pompously behind the newly wedded pair, and during the service held up the Queen's train with his beak. At the banquet that concluded the ceremonies, he sat at her Majesty's left, King Chrystal being seated at her right, and at the feast was fed from golden dishes by the Queen's own hand.

Vera and Chrystal ruled their subjects peacefully and well, and the only person who sometimes was discontented was the Lord High Chancellor, who was occasionally jealous of the parrot, as he felt that his advice was not always

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followed when it chanced to differ from that of the wise old bird.

Viperena was never heard from again, and the Giant did not try to climb any one of the seven mountains.

King Chrystal visited the Wizard's underground storehouse once more, and the jewels, gold, and silver which he found there were paid into the royal treasury for a fund for buying Christmas presents, and candy and toys at other seasons, for poor children. This kind deed made him still more beloved by his people, and wishing to please him in return, they raised money for a Home for Aged and Destitute Parrots, and made his feathered friend the Head Director, an act which was warmly appreciated by their grateful Ruler.

So without disturbance from within or trouble from without the years passed on, and if you should see in your travels the Kingdom of the Seven Mountains, I think you will still find people who speak with regret of the golden age of the reign of Vera the Good and King Chrystal the First, her husband.



VIII

PRINCESS FLORIZELLE AND THE CHEST OF GOLD

WHEN Princess Florizelle was seven years old, her royal mamma took her by the hand and led her out into the garden. There in one corner stood a beautiful rosebush, and upon it seven snow-white half-opened buds.

“One for each year of your life, my little daughter,” said the Queen, “and from to-day you must not forget to tend and water and

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love this particular rosebush, for its welfare is very important to your happiness."

Then she led Florizelle back into the Palace, and when they had reached the royal nursery, she took the Princess on her knee and told her all about the matter.

You see, Florizelle came of a very noble and very ancient family, and for more years than any one could count, the eldest son or daughter of the reigning house had always been given at the age of seven a rosebush like the one then blooming in the Palace garden. It was a magic rosebush, so that it did not matter in the least at what time of the year these birthdays came, there were always seven beautiful rosebuds waiting. Afterwards — that was another matter. If the heir or heiress to the throne were cruel or vain or lazy, the rosebush would droop or even die; and if it were not carefully and lovingly tended, it would soon show it in the stunted, withered flowers it would yield.

When any of these things happened, it became a serious matter, for at seventeen the royal owner had to dig down into the earth about its

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roots and there would find a chest of gold, and the gift within depended on his or her former conduct and the way in which the rosebush had flourished.

Thus, as the Queen told her little daughter, strange things had happened. Florizelle's grandfather had found a sword in his chest, and with it had vanquished all his enemies ; another ancestor had his chest filled with ducats, with which he had been able to bring his inheritance back to prosperity and fruitfulness.

One high-born dame had grown up selfish and neglectful of everything but her own pleasure and comfort. Her rosebush had been but a stilted, barren plant, and in her chest she found only a pinch of dust. What happened then was a sad and awful warning to her descendants, for from that hour she grew daily thinner and thinner, and skinnier and more dried-up looking, till at last she actually blew away like the dust in the casket.

Another Princess had been careful to water her rosebush and tend it daily, but she did not love it in the least, or anybody or anything,

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and was hard and cruel to all about her. Her rosebush put on great thorns and bore no flowers whatsoever, and when she opened her golden chest, she shrieked aloud in mingled fear and anger, for here was only a heap of fetters. In her rage she chopped the plant into a thousand pieces; but this did her no good, for a little later her subjects rebelled, and she was thrown into prison, and wore for the rest of her life chains like those which she had found in the chest of gold.

When Florizelle heard all this, her eyes grew big with wonder, and she shrank closer to her mother's side; but the good Queen, reading her thoughts, bade her take courage, for she told the Princess that if only she were gentle and true and loving, and did not neglect her charge, she would be sure to find a fair gift of great value in her golden casket; and that she must cherish whatever she found there, and never lose it or give it away, for though it sometimes happened that the magic present brought trouble in the beginning, it would be only working in its own way for the owner's real happiness.

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These words sank deep into the little maiden's heart, and as the years went by the rosebush grew and flourished mightily, and Florizelle watched over it with unfailing care, till at last nobody could see the silvery sheen of the magic flowers without thinking at once of the Princess, just as nobody could see the Princess without comparing her immediately in his mind with the pure fragrance-laden blossoms.

The King and Queen were delighted, for here was truth and no flattery, and they and all the Court and of course Florizelle herself, could hardly wait for the eventful seventeenth birthday to dawn. At length it came, and with hands trembling with excitement the Princess seized the silver shovel which the Head Gardener presented to her, and began to dig down among the roots of the fairy rosebush.

Sure enough, in a few moments she struck something hard, and soon uncovered the corner of a carved and golden chest. These magic caskets varied in size, and Florizelle's was not very big. When at last it was lifted from its earthy bed, it was seen that on two sides of it

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were graven scenes in the Princess's childhood and girlhood, while the other two sides were smoothly polished ; and the Queen Mother explained that this was not unusual, and that the doings and life of the Princess would magically appear carved on the blank sides of the casket just as soon as anything of importance should happen to her.

Florizelle, at her father's command, now pressed the spring that opened the magic box, and the lid flew back, disclosing a small pair of sky-blue velvet shoes, thickly encrusted with pearls. The Princess, hardly knowing what to make of this strange gift, slipped the shoes on her feet, and at once she felt an irresistible desire to leave the Palace and seek her fortune in the outer world. In fact, the wish was so strong that it was hard work for her to tarry long enough to explain matters to her father and mother, and it was quite impossible for her to wait for an escort. The King and Queen realized that this was fairy work, and could not be gainsaid, and they therefore sadly watched Florizelle trip lightly away, and comforted themselves as best

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they could with the thought that since the Princess was so sweet and loving, the gift must have been a good gift, and that if she cherished it and obeyed its promptings she would return safe and happy; and that in the mean time, though they could not help or hinder, they could watch the new carving on the golden chest as fast as it appeared, and so know something of what was happening to their absent daughter.

We will leave them, therefore, in their Palace and return to the Princess, who by this time had reached the outskirts of her father's city and was now on the King's highway. The blue shoes seemed to have wings, so easily did they go along, and Florizelle, who had never walked farther than a short stroll about the royal park or to and from her carriage, was not in the least tired.

It was very interesting to her, this view of the open country, and she liked the loneliness, for by this time she had left even the outlying hamlets behind and there was not in sight so much as a peasant to stand and stare and pull his fore-

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lock, or a marketwoman to drop a courtesy as she passed. Before her stretched dark and lonelier still a strip of woodland, and without faltering, the blue shoes made their way along a narrow path that led deeper and deeper into the depths of the forest. Here it was always twilight, and Florizelle began to be a little frightened, the great trees were so solemn and still and the silence so unbroken. But the shoes went on as swiftly as before and only stopped when a gruff voice bade the Princess halt.

✓ Very much frightened now indeed, Florizelle obeyed, for in all her life no one had ever spoken to her like this, nor had her eyes ever rested on such a group of men as now came forth from behind the trees and quite surrounded the trembling Princess. They looked fierce and wild and wicked, as indeed they really were, for poor Florizelle had walked straight into the clutches of a famous robber band, and with rough hands they now tore off her gown of silver tissue, her necklace, rings, and bracelets, and even the new velvet shoes, whose garniture of pearls made the thieves' eyes glisten. Then carelessly throw-

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ing the Princess a ragged skirt and bodice, such as some beggar maid might wear, to replace her own beautiful frock, the thieves departed, having already begun to quarrel over the division of the spoils.

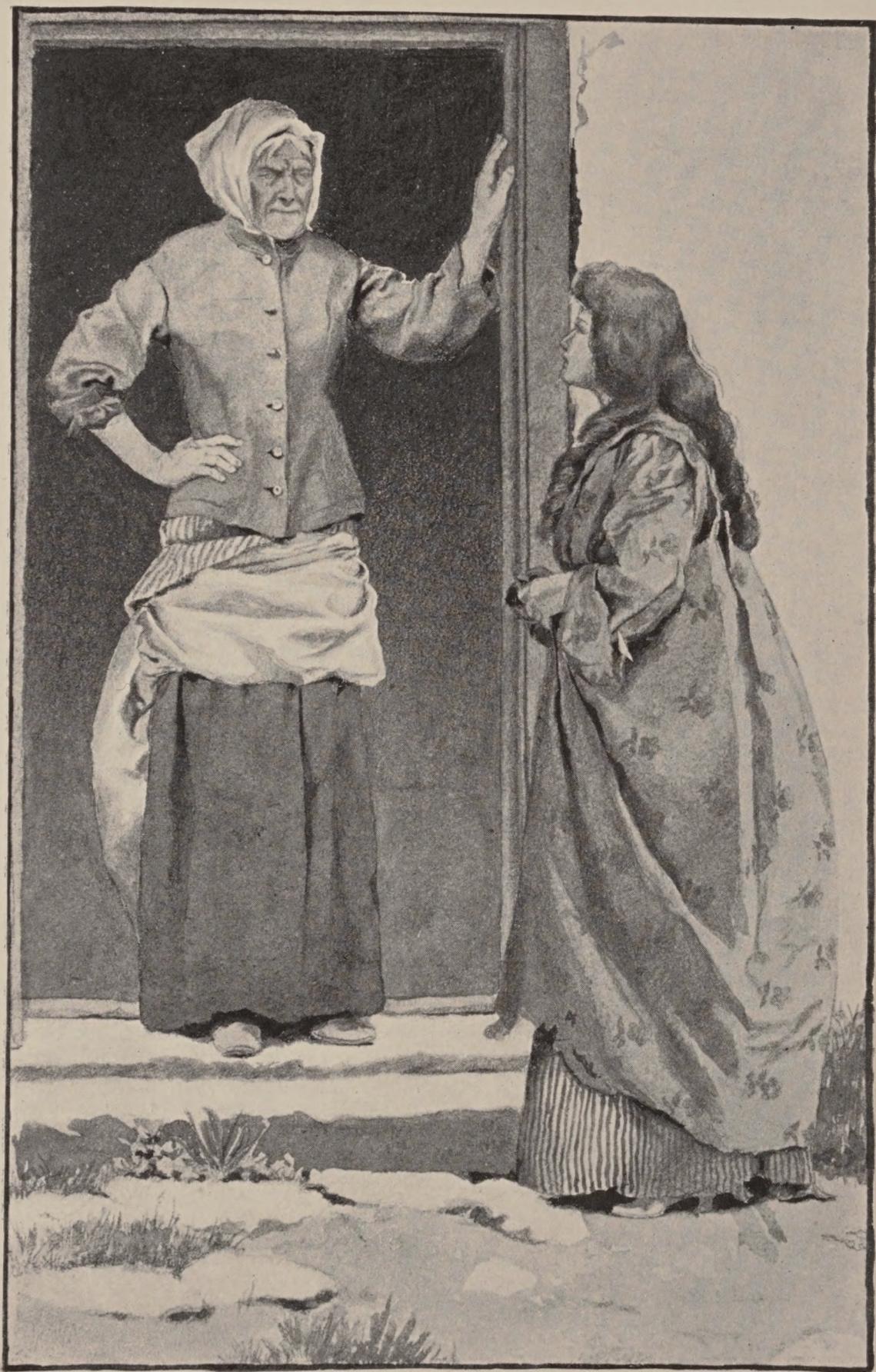
Florizelle threw herself at the foot of a giant oak and wept bitterly, till at last, worn out with sorrow and fatigue, she fell asleep. When she awoke her outstretched hand touched something soft, and there to her surprise were the magic shoes, none the worse for their adventure. She put them on, and straightway turned to the right at their bidding, and before long the Princess found herself on the outskirts of a village which she had never seen before.

Feeling not only tired, but hungry, she stopped at the first cottage and knocked at the door.

“Who is there?” asked a voice from within.

“The Princess Florizelle,” answered the maiden.

At this the door swung open and an aged crone stuck her head out. When she saw the waiting girl, she almost choked with laughter,



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for, as you must know, there are many people in this world who never see anything besides a person's clothes and rate everybody according to the cut and quality of their raiment. Any one with half an eye would have known at once that, despite the rags, this was a true princess; but such an idea never entered into the old woman's head as, putting forth a skinny hand, she pulled the shrinking Florizelle over the threshold.

As the Princess entered the cottage, the fire-light shone on the pearls which ornamented the blue velvet slippers, and the crone's eye was caught by their lustre. At once she made up her mind by hook or by crook to get possession of these jewels, and suddenly changing her manner, became very polite and agreeable, and setting forth bread and milk and a few dried dates, bade the Princess eat as much as she wanted.

This Florizelle was very glad to do, and she suspected no evil when the crone asked her to come with her to a friend's house, "where," said she, "you may find shelter."

The old woman took her straight to the home

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of the village Judge, and there, to the Princess's amazement, she accused the royal maiden of having stolen the magic shoes, for she went on, "How could a kitchen wench — her ragged clothes well showing what she is — how could such a one ever own shoes with pearls like these?" Then she whispered secretly to the Judge, whose covetous eyes by this time had fixed themselves in their turn on the velvet shoes, and the upshot of it all was that the spoils were divided between them, the crone getting one shoe and the Judge the other.

Then the poor Princess was condemned, as punishment, to labor for the hag as servant for a year, and the two wicked old people parted, well pleased with their day's work.

It certainly seemed as though the gift in the golden casket had thus far brought nothing but trouble; but Florizelle remembered, however, the Queen Mother's words, and so flung herself to sleep on the wretched bed of straw provided for her, with the thought of better days to follow.

In the morning, to her repeated surprise, the

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velvet shoes were lying on the floor by her side, just as if nothing had happened ; and she put them on, hoping they would bear her swiftly away, and was both astonished and disappointed when they seemed perfectly content to remain where they were. A pair of clumsy wooden shoes had been provided for her, and the Princess accordingly slipped these on over her velvet slippers, so that they were quite concealed from view.

Hardly had she done so when her new mistress appeared, in a rage over the disappearance of her new-found pearls, and, aiming a blow at the Princess, bade her harshly get about her work, as no idle mouths would be fed in that cottage.

Poor Florizelle accordingly finished dressing as quickly as possible, and all that day worked hard for her exacting and complaining mistress ; and not alone that day, but for many days, until, Princess as she was, there was little left for her to learn about housework, and even the old crone could find no fault with her butter and cheese, or with the various dishes that she learned to make.

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As the magic shoes bore her about her tasks but never away from them, Florizelle tried to please her mistress by inventing several new pastries and sweetmeats, and succeeded so well that the old woman began to boast of her servant's skill, till at length word of it reached the ears of the Head Cook of the King who ruled over the country adjoining that owned by the Princess's father.

He accordingly sent for Florizelle, and her mistress having very unwillingly given her leave to go and the velvet shoes now pointing in the same direction, the royal maiden began to hope that her troubles were nearing an end.

Now the Head Cook was very fat and lazy, and when he found that this new kitchen wench knew her business, he thought it would be a fine idea to let her do most of his work, and if it were satisfactory, he would reap the reward; and if it didn't suit, why, Florizelle was there to bear the blame. So he got a comfortable armchair and stationed himself in a sunny corner of the kitchen, and puffed out his cheeks to make himself look important, and occasionally

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said, "More salt," "Less pepper," or something of that sort, just to show that he was master of that particular department; while Florizelle tripped busily about in her velvet shoes, which the Head Cook thought rather queer foot-gear for a serving-maid, and also that the pearls were undoubtedly imitation, and then gave himself no more concern over the matter.

When the dinner was served, the young King was delighted. He thought, to be sure, much more of hunting than of fine eating, and never lingered long at the banquet; but something about this particular cookery struck him as being very unusually nice, and he sent his compliments to the Head Cook and a purse of gold, in consequence.

Now it chanced that there was a certain small Page who had seen Florizelle and had fallen in love with her sweet ways and lovely face. This Page disliked the Head Cook for being so pompous and disagreeable as much as he liked the new kitchen maid. Florizelle always had a piece of citron or an orange in her apron pocket for the pretty boy, and the Head

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Cook had, on the other hand, only a scowl for him and never so much as a sugared doughnut; so when he saw that the wrong person altogether was getting day by day the King's rewards, he stepped up to his royal master and whispered the true state of the case into his listening ear. Something the Page said about the beauty of the new serving wench and the wonderful shoes she wore made the King curious, and he ordered Florizelle to come before him.

The royal messenger hurried her away without giving the Princess time to so much as put on a clean frock; but the King was a very different person from the old crone, the Judge, and the Head Cook, and no humble attire could hide the noble air of breeding with which this maiden bore herself when ushered into the royal presence.

Her beauty, too, was quite as apparent as her grace, and when on being questioned she replied, "I am the Princess Florizelle," the King believed her at once, and found nothing to laugh at in the statement. So he seated

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the former kitchen maid at his right hand, and, after dismissing his courtiers, begged her to tell him all that had happened and why he had found her in such an unlikely place for a lady of rank to be.

Florizelle at once related the whole story, and the longer the King listened and the longer he looked at the maiden, the more enraptured did he become; and the longer the Princess talked and the longer she looked at the King, the more enchanted was she with her auditor, till at last it was hard to say which had fallen the more deeply in love.

Things having come to this pass, it is not surprising that they both had the same thought at the same time. What if the magic shoes should suddenly bear her away from happiness and new-found peace, only to plunge her into new sorrows and difficulties?

The Princess knew that she must go wherever they led, and the King knew it too, and I am sorry to say that these two hasty young people forgot the wise Queen Mother's warning, and, Florizelle consenting, the King tossed the magic

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slippers into the fire that blazed on the hearth near at hand.

Hardly had he done so when an icy blast blew through the throne room and put the fire out; at the same instant the lightning flashed, thunder pealed with deafening roars that shook the whole Palace, and Florizelle uttered a cry of dismay, for she had tried to reach the King's side, and, behold, her feet would not move. The terrible storm raged on, and at its height a blaze of lightning revealed a figure draped in shimmering raiment, with uplifted threatening finger and beautiful, angry face.

"I am the Fairy of the Rosebush and of the Golden Chest," said she. "Had you trusted me a little longer, you, King, would have won Florizelle as your bride; and you, Princess, would have returned at once to your home, a great and happy Queen. Now for your disobedience I will take from you the magic slippers and the chest of gold, and until they be restored to you, as a living, breathing statue shall you be, for not one step can you take until you again wear the shoes that

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were about to lead you into the paths of joy and peace."

So saying, the Fairy disappeared, and with her went the storm that had preceded her coming, but the sun shone through the clouds without in vain, for darkness had fallen alike on King and Princess and their hearts were sad within them. But even in this new misfortune, for which, to be sure, Florizelle was partly to blame, the sweetness of the Princess's temper did not desert her, and she tried to cheer the King, who was quite desperate at the plight of his sweetheart, and could be consoled only at the thought of finding and putting on the maiden's feet with his own hand the self-same slippers he had so rashly thrown in the fire.

Meanwhile poor Florizelle was placed by tender hands on a flower-strewn couch, music and every sort of entertainment was ordered for her, and the King bade his Court obey her as their mistress, since she was to be his Queen should fortune favor him in the quest which he was about to undertake. The Prime Minister was meanwhile to rule the kingdom during the

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rightful sovereign's absence, and the King commanded him to guard the Princess as his own life and never let her out of his keeping for an instant.

Then came the parting; and the Princess felt her misfortune keenly, since it was now impossible for her to follow her lover even so far as the Palace courtyard, there to see him mount the horse that was to bear him hence. As for the King, he dared not linger, lest his heart fail him altogether, and he therefore spurred his steed forward without so much as a single backward glance at the Palace which held the lady of his love.

He was going now to the home of his old Nurse, where a welcome always awaited him and where he hoped to find help of some kind. She was what is called a White Witch; that is, she dealt in magic, but never to the hurt of any living thing. She cured the peasants' cows for miles around, doctored with her herbs all the sick of the country-side, gave potions to make the maidens comely and the men strong, and settled many a dispute

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with words so full of wisdom that none might contradict her.

When the King came riding up, she knew at once from his face that he was in sore trouble, and, though a man grown, he was still to her the child she had held on her knee, and she comforted him now much as she used to when in old days he had fallen and bumped his princely head.

So she made him sit down in her warm kitchen and tell her all about it, while she donned a new lace cap and snowy kerchief in honor of his visit, and then she took some tea leaves in a saucer and regarded them closely, and at last she said,—

“The Maiden sleeps
Till the Mermaid weeps,”

and bade him seek the golden chest beneath the waters of the Seventh Sea. She told him that a Mermaid guarded there the chest and its contents, and that if he could but make the sea-maiden weep, he could get the Fairy’s gift from her and so break the spell that bound his own fair Princess.

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"But Florizelle does n't sleep," objected the King. "She can't move, that's all."

"It's near enough," answered his old Nurse, really testily for her, "quite near enough for poetry. It's just the same as sleeping if she does n't move, and as for talking, there's a many that talks in their sleep, I can tell you. Now, deary, don't go to losing time in such questions, but come take off your boots till I shake in some of my magic fern-seed; one kind makes people invisible when they walk the earth, as, of course, you've heard, but this kind will make it so that you can go under the water without a-drownden' of yourself. Nasty, wet place it is, too; but I'll slip this onion into your pocket and it will keep off the rheumatism. Some says a horse-chestnut's the thing, but I says an onion every time, and so don't forget it, my deary."

Then the old Nurse made her darling promise to stay one night in the cottage, and had the best sheets airing in a trice, and the horse stabled; and in the morning she gave him a fine breakfast, with just the sort of flapjacks he had liked

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as a child, and sent him off in the right direction in much better spirits.

So the King rode on and on, and at last, one fine morning, he reached the blue rolling waters of the Seventh Sea, and turning loose his horse, he mounted an overhanging rock and cast himself boldly downward.

The waters parted and met again above his head, and still he sank deeper and deeper, till at last his feet touched bottom and he paused to look about him. As he did so, a big shark came up and nearly knocked him down ; but the King drew his sword and valiantly attacked the monster, who, to his Majesty's intense surprise, burst out laughing, for the sword-point had not been able to penetrate his tough skin and had simply tickled him in the ribs.

A number of mischievous sea-urchins now ran along, and began to call after the retreating figure of the King in the most disrespectful manner. "Look at him," they cried. "Look at the tailless creature, and not so much as a fin about him!" "Nor a scale!" cried another. And I do not know what else they might have

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said had not a swordfish policeman stepped up and driven them away.

The King asked this official to kindly point out the nearest road to the Mermaid's Palace, and tried hard to remember the directions, but only got as far as Eel Grass Grove, off Seaweed Avenue, when an enormous lobster caught him by the buttonhole and insisted on pouring out a long story about some clams who claimed to be first cousins, and the King had to use all his wit to escape. At last he did get rid of the troublesome creature, and was rejoiced to see in the green distance the white coral mansion that he knew must be the Mermaid's home.

In fact, as he went down the long avenue with hard sand underfoot and waving sea plants overhead that led to this beautiful building, the Mermaid herself came out to meet him.

She was indeed a lovely being, with flowing sea-green hair of the most fashionable shade, eyes deep and changeful as the sea, a white skin, and a graceful tail, whose scales of shimmering mother-of-pearl showed at once her

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noble birth, as even the most careless observer could see.

The King thought her a sweet creature, and she rather fancied him, and, as mermaids have no heart, it was impossible for her to go farther. She wished indeed that his hair had been the right ocean color, and that instead of those two awkward legs he might have been fortunate enough to have possessed a tail, but even with these disadvantages she was prepared to befriend him, and was as sorry as it was possible for her to be when he explained his mission and asked her please to shed a few tears.

"I have the chest of gold and its contents right enough," she said, "but very good care did the Fairy of the Rosebush take to weave a magic spell about them, which you say can be broken only by my tears. Alas! my friend, I have no heart and cannot grieve thus if I would. But stay awhile in this coral Palace of mine, and I will try to make you forget your disappointment."

So saying, she flung over the King's shoulders a chaplet of sea-anemones, which she told

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him to be careful to wear, since the decoration would serve as a safe-conduct among the many strange and terrible ocean monsters that he would meet, and then bidding him enter the inner court of the Palace, she showed him the golden casket.

The King with a cry of joy at once rushed forward and tried to lift it in his arms, but though he strained and pulled with all his might it would not budge an inch for all his efforts. The pictured face of Florizelle looking up at him from its graven side only increased his sorrow, while the Mermaid gazed at him with puzzled eyes and silently wondered at the curious ways of mortals.

Then the King tried his best to open the golden chest; but here too he was quite as unsuccessful, and at last he gave it up for the present and tried to console himself with writing "Florizelle" on the sand as many times as possible.

The Mermaid, finding this rather uninteresting, at last invited him to drive with her in the chariot of conch shell drawn by mettlesome sea-

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horses and reserved for the use of distinguished visitors.

To this the King assented, and I fear the Mermaid thought him rather poor company, for he spent the entire time of the drive in telling the most mournful stories and then watching her closely to see if at least a tear or two would not trickle down her cheek. But nothing of the kind happened ; and having reached the coral Palace once again, the Mermaid began to show him some of her treasures.

It was really a very unusual and interesting place, and if the King had been free from care, I think he would have enjoyed it all immensely. Even as it was, he could not help exclaiming at the loveliness of the fringed water plants, and at the strings of pearls as big as hazel nuts that the Mermaid hung about her milkwhite neck. Some of the sights were beautiful and some terrible, and some made him forget his troubles for the instant and laugh aloud,—as, for example, a crab race, where the victor was the one who went backward fastest ; or a quarrel between two squids, who kept squirting

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inky water at each other in a very amusing fashion.

Suddenly, however, in the midst of all this entertainment, his old Nurse's last words came to his mind, and he bethought him of the onion in his pocket.

At the same instant the Mermaid spoke to him and asked him with some pride if he had ever looked upon such wonders on the earth from whence he had come.

"Never," replied the King; "and yet," he added, "we too have some strange and curious things, the like of which you, on your part, I am sure have never seen."

"What can they be?" answered the Mermaid, bridling and tossing her head. "You have horses, so have we; you have jewels, but do they equal my pearls? We have dog-fish and cat-fish, and you have dogs and cats. You have birds, we have flying fish; and as for flowers, well, you have just been in my conservatory. Have you anything as fine?"

"You are quite right," the King replied humbly; "but do you know I rather think we

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have better vegetables than you can boast.” And before the Mermaid could answer, he whipped out from his inner pocket the onion which his old Nurse had given him to keep off rheumatism and held it out to the Mermaid. “Put it to your nose,” he said, “and see if its fragrance does not fully equal any flower in your sea country.”

This the Mermaid did without delay, and, presto! how she sneezed; and joy! and rapture! how the tears rolled down her face as the fumes of the onion did their work.

“The Maiden sleeps
Till the Mermaid weeps!”

cried the King in great excitement, and ran as fast as his legs could carry him to the inner court of the coral Palace, followed by the disgusted Mermaid, who swam slowly in her most dignified manner behind him.

Here was the golden chest; and just as he had hoped, the spell that bound it to its ocean bed was loosened, and the King had no difficulty in raising it in his strong young arms.

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Then he had the manners to apologize to the Mermaid, who, being a very good-natured if a somewhat shallow person, soon forgave him ; and bearing his precious burden, he took at once the shortest road for home.

We must now go back for a brief space to Florizelle's royal parents, who had of course watched with the greatest interest the pictures graven on the chest of gold, which told of their daughter's doings.

The old King was a monarch of violent temper, and it took all the Queen's arts to keep him from following Florizelle instantly and executing everybody right and left who had in any way molested her. But his wife kept warning him to beware of meddling with the Fairy of the Rosebush, and to trust that the magic shoes would soon lead the Princess into happier ways ; and she managed to keep him fairly quiet until the awful day which disclosed the Fairy's anger, their daughter's punishment, and the loss of the golden casket.

Then the wrath of the King knew no bounds, and his anger was all directed against Flori-

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zelle's suitor: "that addle-pated boy," as the old Monarch put it, who had thrown the shoes into the fire and so brought all this trouble upon his beloved child. "But I'll fix him," roared the King; and he ordered his army to the front on the instant, and marched off to fight against Florizelle's lover.

Now when the Prime Minister, whom the young King had left as Regent, heard that the Princess's father was coming to bear her away, he was in a great state of mind, between his desire to obey his master and his fear of the approaching enemy. At last, however, the fear of the enemy conquered, since this was a very present evil, and his master, for all he knew, many miles distant. He accordingly ordered everybody to surrender, and with his own hands pulled down the banner that hung from the Palace flag-staff, and the young King's regiments therefore peacefully stacked their arms wherever they chanced to be.'

The invading Monarch's anger was somewhat lessened by this complete submission, so he told his army to stand at attention while their of-

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ficers took possession of the Palace and went to dinner, while he himself sought at once his daughter's chamber to prepare her for the news of her departure for home.

Things were therefore just at this point when Florizelle's lover appeared in the streets of his capital, with the golden chest safe and sound, and you can imagine his indignation at seeing his disarmed soldiers and an enemy's flag proudly waving over his own Palace.

He at once bade his army take up their weapons, and as there were no officers of the enemy present to countermand this order, it was obeyed at once. Then in a loud voice the young King commanded the foe to surrender, and as none of the common soldiers liked to question this new authority, that too was done. Then putting himself at the head of one half of his troops and leaving the rest to guard the prisoners, the young King rode straight to the Palace, which was re-taken without bloodshed, all before Florizelle's father had left his daughter's chamber.

Without wasting words, the victor now sought

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this self-same apartment, and producing the magic slippers from the golden chest, had them on Florizelle's little feet in a jiffy, and before her astonished parent could so much as question the proceeding.

Of course, after that it was all plain sailing. Florizelle and her lover and Florizelle's father and mother were now quite too happy to quarrel with one another, and the two armies marched out side by side with equal honors of war.

The wedding day was set at once, and Florizelle and the young King were married with the greatest magnificence. The Fairy of the Rosebush gave the bride away and beamed upon the loving pair, and when she was leaving she whispered in the bride's ear that Florizelle's troubles were all behind her, and that, as had been promised, the magic shoes should only lead in the future through flower-strewn ways where thorns were all unknown.



IX

THE MAGIC YARDSTICK

IN a little village far from any great city and nearly surrounded by woodland there dwelt, once upon a time, a poor tailor. He had hard work to keep body and soul together, and often went supperless to bed and fireless in winter, for food and fuel were both costly, and as for the latter, though the forest was so near, no one dared break off so much as

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a single twig, since it was all King's property and not for the use of common folk.

It was lucky indeed that Karl was a good tailor, for he had often to invent new stitches to keep his threadbare clothes together, and as for his coat, that had been turned so many times and had faded so many different shades that it would be hard to say whether the original color had been snuff-brown, bottle-green, or navy-blue.

But some people you know are never too poor to do a kind turn for a neighbor, and Karl was one of these people, so that he was well liked in the village, and what trade there was always came to his door.

One fine morning the Burgomaster, who was the rich man of the place, thought that he must have a new cloak, since the old one was getting rather shabby. So he came to Karl, and gave the order, and was very fussy and important about it: only the finest crimson cloth and the best gray squirrel fur trimming were to be used, and this he said several times over. But when the little tailor humbly asked for a golden ducat to

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buy these fine materials, the Burgomaster grew as red as a turkey-cock, and he was so offended at the very idea of payment in advance that, fearing to lose this grand customer's trade, Karl hurriedly promised to make the cloak first and get the money afterward. When the Burgomaster had strutted away, poor Karl looked all about his poor cottage in despair. It would never do to offend so high and mighty a personage, but, on the other hand, where was the golden ducat coming from with which to supply these costly articles?

There was really nothing to sell: a wooden workbench, a bed of straw, a single saucepan, a cracked plate, and an iron knife and fork,—these were his furniture, and if he wanted to sell them ever so much it would be hard indeed to find a purchaser.

The only thing that Karl really could dispose of was his own labor, and as a last resort he determined to go into the forest and seek the spot near a single, giant, blasted oak, where some people said the Dwarf Quicksilver was sometimes to be seen stitching busily on the clothes of the Queen of the Fairies.

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"He's a master tailor, no doubt, from his name," thought poor Karl, "and he'll maybe have little use for me, for though I do my best I'm but a slow worker. Still it's my only chance, and for a golden ducat I'll serve him faithfully for a month's time from midnight to cock-crow, if he'll but trust me and give me the money."

The poor man was really at his wits' end or he would never have dreamed of such a daring proposal. In fact, he was very much afraid of the underworld people, and knew well how uncertain they were in their dealings with mortals. Even in the village there had been two cases already, for had not Fat Peter come home with his best Sunday boots snipped into a thousand pieces by the Dwarf's mischievous scissors, and all because he had walked too heavily over their playground; and, on the other hand, had not pretty Margot found her shoes filled with gold coins, when she had done nothing but pull one of the fairy folk out of a bog where she had seen him one day on her way home?

But the Burgomaster's order was urgent and

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would admit of no delay; so Karl mustered all his courage, dusted off his clothes, and shutting the cottage door behind him, set forth on his errand. The season was winter and the hour late, so that the silvery moonlight played on the snow-laden branches of the trees, and the little tailor hugged himself close to keep out the cold, while the frost nipped his nose and his toes and pinched his ears smartly.

At last he reached the cleared space about the blasted oak, and there, sure enough, he beheld the famous Quicksilver, working away for dear life and heeding the cold not at all. Karl's knees knocked together at the sight, and his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, as he dodged behind the oak-tree in a great state of fright, for all his former resolutions to face the thing like a man.

Perhaps he would have stayed there trembling till morning or till frozen to death by the bitter cold — I really can't tell what might have happened, had not the Dwarf stopped to wax his thread, and then called out in a shrill but not unkindly voice: "Come out! Come out, my good

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lad ! I know your errand and I'll agree to pay you beforehand. Only not in money. Will you work for a month for a yardstick ? ”

Now of course any sensible person would never have agreed to this proposal for an instant, but Karl was so cold and so frightened that he was willing to do anything to escape, and he accordingly promised to serve the Dwarf from midnight to cock-crow for thirty days and all for not so much as a single penny.

Quicksilver bade him come to work the following night, and gave him his own yardstick, saying, as he did so, with a merry twinkle in his eye, “ Measure your cloak when you get home, my friend, and take care that you hold the stick in your left hand when you do so ; ” and Karl took to his heels, tired and disappointed, but glad to be gone at any price.

When he reached his humble cottage, he threw the yardstick into the corner, thinking bitterly what a fool he had been to make such a silly bargain, which he was honest enough to intend to fulfil, since he was, in spite of his fears and failings, a man of his word.

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When morning dawned, he arose from his bed of straw, ate his frugal breakfast, and set his house in order, and then because he had no work on hand to do he got the yardstick from its corner, and, half remembering the Dwarf's words, began to measure his own cloak. As it chanced, he held the stick in his left hand as he did so, and he nearly fell over backward with amazement and delight, when beneath his very eyes the old, worn-out, patched, and faded garment turned under the measure into the finest cloak of crimson cloth, richly trimmed with squirrel's fur and fit for any Burgomaster in the land.

Karl's joy and gratitude can better be imagined than described, and it was with a light heart that he sought the blasted oak, and with the greatest faithfulness that he cut and stitched and pressed, all under the shrewd management of the favorite tailor of the Queen of the Fairies. Of course it was quite impossible for any one to work for such a master without learning something, and at the month's end Karl was as fine a tailor as one would wish to see.

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Meanwhile the Burgomaster came for his crimson cloak, and his delight was so great that he found almost no fault at all with the tailor, and gave him a whole penny over and above the amount of his bill.

Business became quite brisk after this. The Widow Grimm had Wilhelm's school coat turned, and as Karl did not fail to use the magic yardstick in this case also, she told all the neighbors far and near that the garment looked just like new, and one could not see, even with horn spectacles, the old patch on the sleeve, or the place on the skirt where the pig had chewed it. Other people brought their old clothes to be refurbished, and went away with the same story, and at last Karl's fame spread beyond the village and reached the ears of the King himself.

One fine day, therefore, a running footman in gorgeous green and yellow livery, embroidered with the royal arms, appeared at the humble tailor's door, and the village folk gathered close at his heels heard the amazing summons. Karl was to go to Court to cut out the coronation robes of the new Queen! The little tailor

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himself was quite overpowered at the news, and wished greatly that this disturbing honor had fallen elsewhere; but the haughty messenger would admit of no question in the matter, and shook his powdered head so vigorously, when Karl so much as spoke of delay, that the timid little man at once packed up his few belongings, and, having given the key of the cottage to good Widow Grimm, started off, the magic yard-stick clasped tight under his arm.

When he reached the city, his eyes nearly popped out of his head with wonder at the astonishing sights and sounds to be met there on every side. His magnificent companion strode proudly along with his nose in the air, so that Karl dared not question him, and it was really a relief to reach at last the servants' quarters of the King's great Palace, there to be installed in a comfortable room and find himself once more alone.

When he was called to tea in the Servants' Hall, a very pretty and buxom country lass sat by his side, and, taking pity on the stranger, talked so agreeably that Karl was not at all

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lonely, and even mustered up courage to look into his companion's honest brown eyes and thank her for her kindness.

"It may soon be the other way about," she said merrily, "for if you please the new Queen, you will be a very great person, while I am only a scullery maid and likely to stay so. I shall soon see if you remember me!"

"I could n't forget you if I wanted to," answered the little tailor, and then he blushed as red as fire, for he had never said anything as bold as that in his whole life before.

The next morning Karl was summoned to the Queen's presence, and this was quite the most alarming thing that had ever happened to him. Her Majesty's directions were very particular indeed, and it was lucky that the Court Stenographer took them all down, for the tailor was so frightened that the royal orders went out of his mind directly. In fact, he kept bowing and scraping, hardly knowing what he was doing, till the Queen said rather impatiently, "Do stop that man, he makes me quite giddy;" and shortly after that he was led away, followed

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by the Chief Porter, who bore on his head the precious bale of stuff out of which the coronation robes were to be made.

Karl saw the pretty scullery maid scrubbing down the Palace steps, and she gave him a smile that quite heartened him, so that when he reached his room he was able to remember and ask for all the needful tools of his trade,—scissors, needles, pins, wax, and so on,—for everything, in short, but a yardstick, and that, as we well know, he had with him.

Then, when he was again quite alone, he opened the bale of goods and spread them out before him; and never could he so much as have pictured to himself anything half so beautiful. The velvet for the train was sky-blue, with bunches of grapes and leaves worked in a border of pure gold all about the edge; the material for the petticoat was rose-pink satin, with yards and yards of point lace for trimming; the bodice was to be of rose pink, also, but there was an embroidery thickly studded with emeralds, pearls, and diamonds to be used upon it; Karl's eyes fairly glistened with delight,

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for he thought that even a poor workman could hardly fail to make something truly magnificent with material such as these.

In his haste to begin, he seized the magic yardstick, but, alas ! this time in his right hand, all forgetful of the Dwarf's warning. The lovely raiment was in a heap on the table, and Karl began to measure the number of yards it would take in all for the Queen's dress. Horror ! As he did so, beneath his very eyes the beautiful velvet and satin grew dingy and gray, and great holes came in the lace, while the precious stones turned to pebbles, just as the magic yardstick dropped from his hand.

Almost crazed with grief and dismay, the little tailor picked it up, this time in his left hand, as Quicksilver had taught him, and with frantic haste began to re-measure the royal garments, but all in vain ! Once done — done forever ; and when Karl saw this, he dropped his head on his arm and wept bitterly.

As he did so, a gentle knock sounded on the door, which was at length opened, and the rosy face of the scullery maid appeared, for she had

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come to tell the tailor that his tea was ready. When she saw her new friend's sorrowful face, she felt very much concerned, and begged him to tell her what was the matter ; and Karl having done so, her kind words of sympathy were so sweet that the little tailor for the moment almost forgot his fear and grief, and asked her in his turn, if he ever got out of this dreadful trouble, would she not be his wife and go home with him to the village, which he would never on any account leave again ?

At this, Gretchen (for that was the scullery maid's name) said, blushing the while and twisting the corner of her apron, that two heads were better than one, and she would not wait for Karl to get out of trouble, but would marry him at once and help him all she could in this new and terrible state of affairs. Despite the little tailor's rather half-hearted protests, this she did, and the affection of her husband more than repaid her for the risk she was running.

That it was a risk, she knew even better than he, for the new Queen was not a person to be trifled with, and on many accounts it seemed

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best not to stay and face her anger, but seek the aid of the friendly Quicksilver and so set about repairing the damage that had been done.

This was their plan ; but, alas ! like many other well-laid schemes, it came to naught, since, just as their simple preparations for flight had been finished, the Chief Porter appeared with his basket on his head, and said that the Queen had changed her royal mind and that the coronation robes were to be sent back to the Palace immediately. The tailor was also commanded to accompany the Porter ; and seeing that there was no help for it, Karl, with his yardstick under his arm, went shivering and quaking along, with hanging head, while brave Gretchen marched sturdily beside him, trying her best to keep up his failing spirits with words of cheer.

When at last they reached the Queen's presence, to make matters worse, the King was there also, and the sight of these two high-born personages was really too much for the tailor, whose teeth chattered so with fright that he could not utter a single syllable. Seeing this,

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Gretchen stepped forth and told the whole story, but when she came to the part where the robes were ruined, the Queen shrieked and snatched the poor dingy garments from their basket; where in the pitiless sunlight their condition was plainly revealed, she at once went into violent hysterics.

Seeing this, the King was beside himself with anxiety, and his rage increased to such an extent that it was lucky for the newly made husband and wife that he could find at the moment but few words in which to vent his anger. "T—t—turn them out," he stammered wrathfully, stamping on the ground with his foot as he spoke. "Let them make the damage good in a week's time or their heads shall pay for it;" and seizing the magic yardstick with his own hand, he broke it in two and flung the pieces at the cowering tailor's head.

Gretchen picked them up, and taking her husband by the elbow, hurried him away from the royal presence; and the pair were jostled and pushed along by the waiting grooms without, and driven through the streets with jeers and stone-

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throwing, till at last the gates of the city were shut behind them and they were told to look sharp, since the eye of the law was upon them, and the King's orders would be carried out to the letter.

When Karl got his breath, he began to moan over his misfortune, and "Only a week," wailed he, "in which to make matters right."

But Gretchen said, "Seven whole days!" Who knew what good luck might be theirs? And it was a fine bit of fortune that the Queen had been taken with hysterics, since had she been able to speak her mind, their heads ere this would have surely left their shoulders. The thing to do now was to reach Quicksilver's haunts as soon as possible. This made Karl ashamed of his despair, and he trudged along with his wife, and tried to imitate her cheerfulness to the best of his ability.

They had not been given time to take their modest belongings, only the broken yardstick remained, and when Karl tried its magic properties on his own cloak, he found that with its breaking its power had vanished, and it made

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no difference now in which hand he held it — nothing whatsoever happened.

He was all for throwing the pieces away, but, Gretchen objecting, he gave up the idea, and they continued their journey homeward, Karl earning shelter and food for both by the diligent use of his needle, and Gretchen winning friends everywhere by her pleasant face and manner.

But when at midnight they reached the blasted oak and found Quicksilver there plying his trade as of yore, they were doomed to disappointment, for the Dwarf's sharp eyes saw the broken yardstick at once, and he chased them from his presence, saying angrily that he had no time to talk with folk who could not properly appreciate and care for magic gifts ; and that the Queen of the Fairies herself was to hold her Midwinter Revel on that very spot the next night, and that he had more than enough to do to finish her order without wasting on silly mortals the precious moments.

Karl and Gretchen, therefore, turned sadly away to seek their humble cottage; but the good wife's brain was already busy, and the next day

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she bade her husband sell his tools, and buy a rooster with the proceeds. Now this certainly seemed a very unwise request, but by this time the tailor had learned to believe greatly in Gretchen's cleverness, and he accordingly obeyed her to the letter, coming home at noonday with a fine cock under his arm, "Though, to be sure, what she wants it for, I can't imagine," thought he. "And if it's for soup, a fat pullet would surely be better." But he said nothing of the kind to his wife, and she held her peace also, and only telling him to be ready at midnight, since their one hope now lay with the Queen of the Fairies, whom it was her intention to seek.

Karl didn't much like these twelve-o'clock rambles, and was sorely afraid, as we have seen, of all the fairy folk and their doings; but again he decided to follow his wife's course, since their plight could hardly become more wretched than it now was.

A little before midnight, therefore, the pair set out, and the tailor saw that Gretchen had the rooster along with her, tied up in a singular

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manner in a bag, so that it could breathe but could not see. She also carried the broken yardstick. Karl wondered if her many troubles had made his wife crazy, and he sighed heavily, but thought the matter past mending by any words of his.

After a brisk walk through the frosty air, the tailor and his wife reached the forest, a little later nearing the clearing where their journey was to end. By Gretchen's advice they now concealed themselves in the thick under-brush near it, for the hour of the Fairies' Revel was at hand.

Twelve o'clock ! and a mighty scampering of tiny feet was followed by a rush of fairy workmen, who quick as thought swarmed up the tree-trunks and hung thousands of glittering, frosted silver lamps from the branches, so that the place was soon as bright as day. Some of the workmen brought mushroom seats ; while others in turn set the banquet table, trimmed it with mistletoe and holly, and saw that the acorn cups were brimming with elderberry wine. Then a throne, cushioned with snow-drop petals, was

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made ready for the Queen ; and finally the Court fairies entered, with their Sovereign in their midst in a sleigh drawn by eight spirited white mice. The Fairy Queen was dressed in ivory satin, trimmed with swansdown, with a mantle and muff of ermine. On her head was a crown of diamond stars, and her wand was tipped with another glowing, pure white brilliant.

When she was seated on her throne, a Herald appeared and, blowing three blasts on a tiny trumpet, proclaimed in a loud voice : “Oyez ! Oyez ! Know all ye fairies in Court assembled ! The most puissant and high-born Lady, Mab, Queen of Fairy-land, holds Winter Revel from midnight to cock-crow.” And the frolic at once began. Such snowballing, such daring swaying from icy branch to branch, such ripples of elfin laughter, such light-footed dancing !

In the very midst of it all Gretchen, with the rooster concealed beneath her apron, stepped forth, and instantly all this mirth and merry-making ceased, while the Queen looked in anger upon this rash mortal. But Gretchen, who had by this time pulled the trembling Karl from his hiding-

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place, gave her Majesty no time to speak, but in a modest voice explained her errand. It was, said she, her earnest wish to please the Fairy Queen, and she and her husband, if so her Royal Highness willed, would teach both Court and Sovereign some novelties in games and sports.

The fairies at these words at once crowded close, and even the Queen leaned down from her throne and bade Gretchen speak further of this matter. So the good wife told the listening little folk about Puss-in-the-corner. Follow-my-leader, Stage-coach, and various other fine old-fashioned games, and soon the fun was fast and furious; even her Majesty tucking up her train and joining in the mad revel. At last Gretchen suggested "Blind-man's-buff," with Karl for the centre of the ring; and since blindfolded he might, without knowing it, trample on some of the fairy folk the Queen waved her wand thrice, and immediately she and all her subjects grew to the size of ordinary men and women.

Gretchen had told her husband to try and

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catch the Fairy Queen, if possible, and tied the kerchief about his eyes in such a way that he could see the feet of those playing the game. Now her Majesty had some very handsome diamond rosettes upon her slippers, and it was therefore easy for the tailor to single her out from the rest of the company.

"In this game," said Gretchen, "we shall have forfeits, and those that are caught will have to give up something of value which belongs to them and can only regain it by doing exactly as the blindman tells them."

"Very well," said the Queen. "We shall be glad to see a clumsy-footed mortal catch even one of our number. But before we commence, remember you and your husband are in our power, and even should a fairy be forced to pay a forfeit, you must not ask for protection from midnight to cock-crow. Uninvited you have forced yourselves upon us in this our Midwinter Revel, and we have not punished your rashness as yet, only because it has so pleased us. And now, Sir Tailor — to the game!"

So saying, the Queen gave poor Karl a push

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that sent him spinning, and this was the signal for all the other fairies to begin their elfish pranks. And though they tweaked his hair and nipped his legs with their nimble fingers and turned him this way and that, in the end it was all for the best, since otherwise he never would have been able to lay a finger on so much as one of the light-footed fairy folk.

Karl patiently bided his time, and as Mab and her following slipped again and again through and under his outstretched arms, they became ever bolder and bolder, till all at once the tailor spied his chance, and as the diamond rosetted slippers went twinkling by, he gave a sudden leap and had the Fairy Queen clasped tight and fast in an instant.

Gretchen had told him the part he was to play; so in a loud voice he called out at once that it was her Majesty who had been fairly caught, and then he had the royal crown from her head in a flash. “A forfeit, a very fine forfeit. What must the owner do to redeem it?” he asked.

“She must grant us three wishes,” replied

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Gretchen promptly, at the same time deftly undoing the knot in the handkerchief that held the tailor blindfold.

Now the Fairy Queen was by this time very angry: first, that she had been the one to be caught; and second, that a mere mortal should have dared to lay so much as a finger on the royal crown, something that had never happened before, so she said coldly: "Three wishes and no more will I grant, but, look you, the Midwinter Revel has still many hours to run and you are my prisoners."

Something in her voice made Karl tremble, and he looked to his wife, who, since she had got them into this trouble, must try to find a way out again. "Tell her what you wish," he said.

"First, then, may it please your Majesty," said Gretchen, keeping close the while in the friendly shadow of the trees, "first, will you command Quicksilver to mend the yardstick he gave my husband, so that its magic properties may be restored?"

"Granted," answered the Queen. "Come

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hither, Quicksilver, and mend the creature's yardstick."

With a very poor grace the Dwarf obeyed, and joining the pieces together, ran his hand along the broken edges, and on the instant the thing was done and the yardstick as good as new.

"What further?" asked the Queen.

"That your Majesty would deign to give my husband the means of restoring the Queen's coronation robes to even more than their first beauty," replied Gretchen.

"Done," answered the Fairy Queen; and she pulled a single hair from her head and gave it to the wondering Karl, who twined it about his finger for safe keeping. "Burn this hair in the flame of a lighted taper held above the robes and your wish is accomplished. And now for your third request. Speak, and quickly, since time and patience alike wax short."

"This then, great Queen," said Gretchen, "that you and your subjects will not molest us after cock-crow."

"Ah!" replied Mab, with scorn in eye and



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tone, "you think yourself very clever, do you not? And as you ask, so shall it be done; but neither do you go scot-free, since you and your fine tailor husband are still in my power. Come, fairies, come and pinch them black and blue and beat them soundly, the pair of them, with their own magic yardstick."

At these words the whole elfin number sprang forward, and things looked dark, as you may imagine, for the poor tailor and his wife; but while the Queen had been speaking, wise Gretchen had loosed the rooster from the bag, and, seeing so many lights, the bird thought of course that night was over, and just as the fairy folk rushed to the attack, "Cock-a-doodle-doo-o," rang clear through the forest.

In an instant darkness fell, every fairy vanished, and the space about the blasted oak was deserted; while Karl and Gretchen, with cock and yardstick, took to their heels, and soon reached, breathless and panting but safe, their own cottage door.

The next morning early, the tailor and his wife set forth on their journey to the capital,

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and reached there just in time, since the week of grace was over. The Chief of Police was ready and waiting, and grimly bade them come with him to their Majesties' presence, and they found the Lord High Executioner there before them, tenderly feeling the edge of his axe, and looking in their direction much oftener than was pleasant. The King was gruff, and the Queen's eyes were still red with weeping ; the coronation robes were brought in and laid, an unsightly mass of soiled and dingy stuff, before the throne,—the pebbles which had once been precious stones upon the top.

Then Karl in a small thin voice requested the use of a lighted taper, and the King ordered it brought in, but added sternly : “Look you, my man, no foolish mummary,” and glared at the trembling tailor so fiercely that I think his legs would have given out completely, had not sturdy Gretchen supported him with her arm and whispered “Courage” into his ear as she did so.

Then before Court and Sovereign a marvellous thing happened. As the hair from the head of the Fairy Queen burned in the flame, the color

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and sheen came back to the royal raiment, the gold thread of the embroideries glistened, the lace became whole and new, and a glittering heap of dazzling jewels reposed in the place where the pebbles had been a moment before. Indeed, before the hair was quite consumed, the gems shone with such lustre that the Queen had to shade her eyes with her fan; while the satin took on the texture and finish of a pink rose-leaf, and the lace became fine as a cobweb, while the blue velvet train seemed cut from a piece of the very sky itself.

For a moment after there was silence, and then his Majesty's hearty "Well done, my man! well done!" broke the stillness, while the weathercock courtiers crowded about Karl and his wife with words of praise, and the Lord High Executioner put his axe over his shoulder and slunk out a back way.

The King, in fact, was so delighted that he wanted Karl to accept again the post of Court Tailor; but our hero had had quite enough of high life and besought only permission to depart. This seemed to please the Queen, who was really

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too glad to get her coronation robes back safely, to wish to risk them further with one whose magic had been so uncertain; and accordingly Karl and Gretchen were dismissed from the royal presence, but not before a fat purse of gold pieces had been thrust into the little tailor's hand.

Their going this time was quite a different matter from that of the week before. "Way for the King's tailor! Way for the Queen's favorite!" called the lackeys, and even the policemen touched their helmets with their billies, as they kept back the admiring crowd.

But neither Karl nor Gretchen was used to such state, and they were really glad when once again the gates of the city shut behind them and they were facing homeward for the last time. When they reached the village, their fame they found had travelled faster, and the neighbors greeted them with open arms.

Karl at once, by Gretchen's advice, put the King's money into a fine new cottage, with pigsty and garden all complete, and when it was finished it had three whole rooms and an attic,

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and even the Burgomaster could boast no more. Nor could that important person vie with the plenishing of the larder, since a dozen hams hung from the kitchen rafters ; and no housewife in all the country-side had more tumblers of jelly to her credit, or better cowslip wine.

Here, therefore, after all their troubles did Karl and Gretchen live in peace and plenty. In years to come the happy voices of children rang through house and garden, and sturdy lads and merry-faced girls rode a-cock-horse on the magic yardstick.

In fact, this useful article made Karl a tailor beyond compare and the pride of all the village, while by its help the porridge bowl had never need to go empty, and the stocking under the hearthstone grew fat to bursting with the silver pieces it contained.



X

CHILDREN OF THE SUN

SOL and Soltus were the Sun King's only children, and they looked as much alike as two peas in a pod. As a matter of fact, they were twins, and fine handsome lads they were, with clear blue eyes and curling red hair, that stood out from their heads like a halo of flame, and had thus the real royal color and appearance.

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They were happy boys, too, in the main, though their father, the Sun, had a hot temper, and was often either blazing with wrath or else sulking in gray and gloomy solitude. When the first happened, the Earth People wiped their foreheads and said it was "such a hot day," and when the last state of things was in progress, they said, "Dear me! what dull weather we're having! I do wish the Sun would come out from behind the clouds."

In spite of all these faults, however, the King loved his children dearly and gave them almost everything they wanted, except permission to visit the Earth, which happened to be the wish most near to their hearts.

The reason they desired this so much was because of the wonderful tales told them of the planet in question by Luna, their grandmother, whose other name was the Moon Queen. Sol and Soltus used to go to see her sometimes, and what jolly visits they were, though I fear their noble father would not always have approved of their proceedings.

To begin with, as the Moon Country was

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altogether different from the Sun Kingdom, the twins had first to don white suits of fur, which covered them from top to toe, and showed only their blue eyes and the tips of their royal noses. This was to keep out the cold, which, protected in this way, they did not mind a bit. Then Luna, their grandmother, was very indulgent and had her subjects make fine long coasts for her young visitors. You may sometimes hear silly Earth People talking about the craters in the Moon. What they think craters are really the fine snow-slides especially constructed for the princely amusement of Sol and Soltus, and which remain even to this day.

In the evenings the old Queen used to call her grandchildren to her knee and tell them wonderful stories about the Earth and the People who lived upon it. The Moon Kingdom was the nearest of any of the heavenly bodies to this planet, and so Luna knew a great deal about it, and had much to say of her importance there.

"Why, without me," said she, "they have to use tiny lights as small as pin heads to see at all at night; and if I didn't attend to it, I don't

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know how they would ever manage the tides, for I make their great oceans flow high or low at my bidding. Beside that there is a special race of men, called Poets, who write very pleasingly about me, and to whom I am most necessary; and I am a great favorite, beside, with young men and young maidens. Your father, my dears, is a very worthy person, but he never could bring about the love matches that I have done;" and the Queen leaned back on her silver throne with a very proud expression of satisfaction on her face.

Sol and Soltus didn't care much about this part of their royal grandmother's story, but they were polite, well-brought-up lads, and they therefore listened respectfully in silence, and were usually rewarded at last by Earth tales that were really interesting: about the queer color of the trees and grass,—green, if you will believe it, instead of yellow,—and the strange four-footed beasts that roamed about the land. The thing called water, too, was very different from the streams of molten gold that flowed through the Sun Country, though the Earth

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People did have frozen lumps of something that looked like this same gold, and prized it to a truly ridiculous extent, toiling for days and digging deep in the hard ground for even the tiniest fragments.

The more they heard of this strange country, the more Sol and Soltus were determined to see it for themselves ; but there was only one person beside their father and grandmother who knew the way to get there, and this was the Great Bear, a remarkably crusty old person, who spent most of his time sprawling about in the Heavens and who bothered his head very little indeed about either earth or sky people.

One day, however, their chance came to get at the secret, and this is the way it happened. A Comet Messenger darted into the Sun's presence, with his long court train flowing behind him, and with sparkling eyes though humble mien told his royal Master that the Great Bear had somehow, with one of his clumsy twists and turns, knocked over the Big Dipper, and that everything in that part of the Heavens was helter-skelter in consequence.

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This made the Sun King very angry, and he commanded that the trouble should be remedied at once, or the Lord Executioner would take the sword of Orion, so rarely used that it had not for years left the peg on which it hung, and chop off the Great Bear's head.

Now Sol and Soltus felt very sorry when they heard this terrible sentence, for they knew full well that the Great Bear, in spite of his gigantic strength, would never be able with his clumsy paws to undo the mischief; so they determined to help him, and flew about with such right good-will that they soon had a numerous following, and by good luck and hard work had the Big Dipper in place again, with the loss of but a few unimportant falling stars.

The Great Bear was very grateful, as you may imagine, and when Sol and Soltus asked him to tell them how to get to the Earth planet, he did so at once, for he was rather a stupid fellow and could not imagine that the Sun's children could come to any harm in any place where they should choose to go.

"You must wait for your royal father," he

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said, "and some day when he is feeling particularly good-natured, just after a rain storm, he 'll throw a bridge from his Palace to the Earth below: down there they call it a rainbow; and you can both slide down it if you are quick and do so before it melts away."

"Thank you, thank you," cried the twins, heartily; and from that day they hung about the royal residence in a manner quite unusual before, and tried their best to keep their royal parent in a good humor.

At last, much to their joy, the wished-for moment came, and without waiting an instant the pair climbed up on the bridge, and shutting their eyes, let themselves go, sliding at once with terrific rapidity Earthward (just as you, boys, slide — only more slowly — down the front-stair banister). Bang! bump! bump! and the twins opened their eyes.

It was really true. About them was a wide stretch of soft green lawn, ornamented by gorgeous flower-beds, relieved by tinkling fountains and palm and cocoanut trees. You see the twins had fallen upon a kingdom in the tropics;

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but that did not trouble them, since the heat in their father's dominions was so very much greater.

In the distance appeared a beautiful Palace, with graceful, rounded towers and arches, and as they looked, the great middle door swung open and a noble cavalcade came forth. The person of chief importance in this procession was dressed in bright orange, and this being the royal color in the Sun Kingdom, pleased Sol and Soltus, who stood watching. Over his head was borne a great mushroom-shaped, scarlet something, supported by a bamboo stick; and Soltus, on questioning a bystander, for a crowd had already assembled to watch the imperial progress, was told that this was a parasol.

"But what is it for?" asked Soltus, and when the man, with a look of surprise at such ignorance, answered shortly, "To keep the Sun off," both the twins were filled with amazement. If such a simple thing as this could really keep their great father away against his will, why, this *was* indeed a marvellous country and the lord thereof a mighty Ruler.

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By this time the Grand Mogul — for so kings were called in that part of the world — by this time, as I say, the haughty Monarch observed the Sun Princes, and his imperial curiosity was aroused by the difference in their looks, bearing, and costume from those of the men and women of his dominions.

So he called the First Lord-in-Waiting, who told the Illustrious Messenger-in-Ordinary, who repeated to the Chief Master of Ceremonies, who commanded the Principal Usher, who bade the High-born Commander of Pages to send the lackey of most consequence present, to call Sol and Soltus to the imperial presence.

This was immediately done, and the twins were at once handed over, by the lackey of most consequence present, to the High-born Commander of Pages, to the Principal Usher, to the Chief Master of Ceremonies, to the Illustrious Messenger-in-Ordinary, to the First Lord-in-Waiting, who escorted them to the edge of the royal purple carpet which had been spread for the Grand Mogul to walk upon ; and at a sign from this mighty personage the Most

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Noble Parasol Bearer began to question them as to their names, their birthplace, and their future movements.

Sol and Soltus felt that it would be unwise to tell all this at once, so they contented themselves with explaining that they were twin brothers, sons of a King who ruled a mighty country far away, and that they hoped before returning to see something of the great Kingdom in which they found themselves, and they trusted, further, that this would not be displeasing to the most noble Ruler of these same dominions.

At this the Grand Mogul graciously allowed a fleeting smile to illuminate his illustrious countenance, and the expression was at once reflected on the respective faces of the Most Noble Parasol Bearer, the First Lord-in-Waiting, the Illustrious Messenger-in-Ordinary, the Chief Master of Ceremonies, the Principal Usher, the High-born Commander of Pages, and the lackey of the most consequence present, who, by the time the smile reached him, was grinning from ear to ear.

At the Grand Mogul's command Sol and

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Soltus joined the imperial train, and a little later found themselves in the Palace, where a suite of rooms in accordance with their rank was prepared for them.

Meanwhile the Sun King, their father, had discovered their escapade, and his anger was so fierce that his rays melted the very icebergs about the North Pole; and when this fit of passion subsided, he withdrew himself completely in the very middle of the day, so that the Earth People went about with lanterns, talking of what they called a "total eclipse," while the Sun King continued to sulk and fume till the very farthest little star in the Heavens shook and twinkled with anxiety and alarm.

Of course the twins understood what the matter was, but they thought that now they had at last reached their journey's end they had better stay awhile and see how they liked it; and perhaps their grandmother Luna would be able to somewhat calm their father's anger, for that she would take their part they very well knew.

Indeed that same night a Meteor came in through the open window of their apartment, with

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a message from their royal parent, in which he bade them stay in their chosen abode for the present — the exile to be a punishment for their disobedience. Later, if they so desired, they might return, since one chance and one only would then be given them to do so; and this favor was due solely, as they had best understand, to the pleading of their Moon Queen grandmother.

Several pleasant weeks were spent by the Sun's children at the Court of the Grand Mogul; but one day they came to grief and were banished from that monarch's presence, and I will tell you how it happened.

You see, in front of the Palace there was built a marble terrace, ornamented with pots of palms and orange-trees, and made beautiful by birds of every hue,— not to mention monkeys, who, to please the royal fancy, were painted in the most brilliant colorings, some blue with pink tails, some spotted like leopards, and others striped like the tigers of the jungle.

These were, of course, very fine indeed, but they were not half so magnificent as the Grand Mogul's chief favorite,— a peacock whose jew-

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elled train was equalled only by his master when in full Court dress. This, alas ! was not the only resemblance between the two, for if the peacock strutted about in the most ridiculous fashion, so did the Grand Mogul, and it would be hard to choose which looked the more foolish.

It chanced, therefore, one morning that the Eastern monarch was walking upon the terrace, just as the peacock alighted on the marble pavement behind him, and the Grand Mogul's airs and graces were so faithfully copied by the bird at his heels that Sol and Soltus, who happened to be watching at a little distance, burst out laughing before they knew it.

Now to sneeze or to cough in the Emperor's presence was bad enough, but to laugh ! — why, the whole royal suite from the Most Noble Parasol Bearer to the lackey of the least consequence present turned pale with horror at the sound. The Grand Mogul, on the contrary, grew very red in the face, and it was lucky indeed that he was too angry to ask for an explanation, since that would certainly have made for the twins a bad matter worse.

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As it was, a majestic wave of the Emperor's hand conveyed their sentence, and they were hustled from the imperial presence with little ceremony and bundled out of the Palace, with grim instructions nevermore to dare to show so much as the tip of their noses within the royal dominions.

Sol and Soltus, therefore, set forth once again upon their adventures, and found the world a very different place, as you may well believe. Nobody had so much as a kind word for the disgraced favorites, and since ill news travels fast, the twins decided at length to quit the more frequented highways and go forth into the jungle.

Of their many adventures there I have not time to tell you. I will only say that the animals, wiser than men, respected their royal origin and that no harm befell them, though they supped with tigers, rode upon wild elephants, played with great apes, and slept with lions; drinking from still pools of water when they could; eating fruit, nuts, and berries; and feasting indeed on cocoanut milk when their

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way led thither. Their garments, of course, were soon torn and their feet often weary, but they did not regret the Court life they had left, neither did they mourn for their own land and the Palace of the Sun Father.

At last, one morning, they stepped, without knowing it, over the border line that separated the jungle from the Magic Country, a place to which few travellers have ever journeyed. The first thing that met their eyes was a party of queer little Brown People, dancing about a great fire and trying, with but small success, to pull from the blaze some strange-looking flap-jacks which hissed upon a big iron griddle, suspended in a mysterious way in the centre of the flames.

To Sol and Soltus fire was ever friendly, and they earned the warmest thanks of the Brown People by pulling out the flap-jacks one by one and distributing them among their new friends. The small Brown People crammed their mouths full in a way I would advise no child to imitate, and rolled their eyes, and rubbed their stomachs in a manner that left no doubt of their feelings

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about flap-jacks in general and these in particular. The twins thought the Brown People would never have enough, and the supply in the iron griddle seemed ever, in some magical fashion, renewed; but at last they stopped their cramming and dancing, and one by one sat down, till at length all were arranged in a grave circle about the twins and the fire.

Sol and Soltus looked at the Brown People, and the Brown People looked at them; and finally the very smallest and most shrivelled of the fairy folk arose and solemnly presented each of the royal pair with a hazel nut, on which was written in tiny letters "Crack me!" He then clapped his little hands together, and the whole party instantly disappeared.

Sol rubbed his eyes, and Soltus felt quite dizzy at this sudden happening; but the fairy gift at least remained, and the brothers lost no time in obeying the directions inscribed upon it. I do not know what the twins expected, but there was really quite a comical look of disappointment on their faces, as only a slip of paper appeared when they broke the nuts.

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Sol read the writing on his aloud :—

“One doth spin, another doth churn ;
To help the first you must quickly learn.
This having done, turn to the Sun ;
Do as he bids and your luck 's begun.”

Soltus, as much amazed as his brother at this rigmarole, opened his paper and followed Sol's example.

“One doth churn, another doth spin ;
Help the first and your luck will begin.
Old Mother Holle, so wise is she,
Will know in the doing whose sons you be.”

“Well,” said the twins in one breath, “did you ever hear such nonsense?” and then they both laughed till the woods rang with their merriment.

But they were to be still more astonished, as you will soon learn, for on coming to an opening in the wood, what did they see but a pretty moss-roofed cottage, and in front of the open door two beautiful damsels, one churning and one spinning, and both weeping as if their hearts would break. Sol and Soltus could not remain concealed after this, but sprang forward and

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besought the maidens to tell them the cause of their trouble.

“I am Friga,” said the first, who sat beside her churn, “and that is my sister Frida, whom you see there by her wheel. We have been brought up since we were babies by Mother Holle, who makes it snow and attends to the weather. She is very old and wise, and she has been kind, though strict; that is, until to-day —”

“When,” broke in Frida, “she gave me these cobwebs to spin into silk, and my sister there, water to churn into butter.”

“How very ridiculous!” said Soltus, hotly; while Sol stood entranced, gazing at the sisters, who were as nearly alike in looks as it was possible to be, so that none could say which was the more beautiful.

The sunbeams had been caught in the meshes of their hair, and their eyes were deeply blue and shone like stars. Their voices were low and sweet, and one felt on beholding their loveliness that they were quite as good as they were beautiful.

Then the twins remembered the words of the verses they had just read, and wished with all

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their might that they could indeed help these fair maidens in their trouble.

"Mother Holle has given us till to-night to do her bidding," said Friga, "and when she returns, if our tasks are not completed, she will send us away to the Desert Fairy, who is so ugly that it makes one shudder to look at her, and there we must stay as her servants."

"Never shall such a thing happen," cried Sol, stoutly; and Soltus said the same, though neither of them had the least idea how to prevent it.

At last Sol spoke to poor Frida, whose cobweb thread broke constantly as she turned her wheel, and he said, "Let me try my hand at the task," for all at once he had remembered a spinning song that his grandmother, the Moon Queen, had used to croon softly to herself, and something told him that there was magic in the words.

In spite of her trouble, Frida could not help laughing at the awkward way in which the youth took the thread between his fingers and began to turn the wheel, but her eyes grew big with wonder, when, as a strange, low, humming chant broke the stillness, the cobweb threads grew

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firm, then silky and shining with the soft radiance of moonbeams, and as Sol, much excited, spun faster and faster, a web of silver tissue, silken soft, appeared before their delighted gaze and grew rapidly beneath it till the last cobweb was finished.

“How can I ever thank you?” said the maiden, gratefully, “but how much I wish poor Friga’s task was as well over.”

“It shall be,” cried Soltus, who had been thinking hard to some purpose. “Since my brother can spin so well, let me see what I can do at the churn; but first I must drop into the water these bits of gold — all that is left from the embroidery that my brother and I brought with us on our garments when we came from the Sun country. It is different from the Earth metal, and something tells me it will help us.”

So saying, he began to churn as hard as ever he could, thump, thump, thumpety, thump. It went easy enough at first, but soon to everybody’s great delight it became harder to move the handle, and at last Friga could wait no longer, but must lift the cover and peer into

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the churn itself, and then her cry of joy made the good news clear to them all.

Such butter, such golden butter! In a twinkling Friga had it out, and with her pretty white fingers had moulded it into the shape of a big sunflower, which pleased the twins immensely, since this was their own royal badge and one that they had not seen since leaving their father's Palace.

Just then a new figure appeared in their midst, and a silence fell upon all, for the sun was setting, and Mother Holle had returned a little ahead of time. The twins gazed upon her in something akin to fear, for no one can see Mother Holle without such heart fluttering.

What they beheld was a very old, old woman, bent nearly double and leaning upon a crutch. A long brown cloak fell from her shoulders, and upon her head was a cap with white frills. Her face was crisscrossed with hundreds of tiny wrinkles, but her small black eyes were sharp as gimlets and bright as diamonds.

Without a word Mother Holle hobbled over to Frida, and drew the shining silver tissue from

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her unresisting fingers. "Moon's song, moon's song!" muttered she, and turned to the butter which Friga still proudly held. "Sun's gold, sun's gold!" she said twice over; and then she approached the twins, who stood silent.

"Children of the Sun," she continued, "I have foreseen your coming and I read your hearts. You, Sol, would have Frida for your Princess, and you, Soltus, my other adopted daughter, Friga; good girls both and good housewives, for I have made them so. Yet not so fast," she commanded, as the joyful twins stepped forward toward the blushing maidens. "You are yet in disgrace with your royal father, and though you have helped me win my wager with the Desert Fairy, for which deed she shall give you a goodly slice of her dominions, you may not wed these maidens till you obtain forgiveness from your sire, and his permission to make forever the Earth your home. Go then and seek him ere he leaves the world to darkness. See, he lingers yet on the horizon. Be quick and at noonday to-morrow to the cottage with his answer."

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So saying, Mother Holle pointed with her crutch to the open door of the house, which Frida and Friga slowly entered. She followed and closed it behind her, and the twins found themselves alone.

"You, Sol, were ever father's favorite," said Soltus. "Quick, speak to him, and since he promised us a chance of return, beg him to send a rainbow, that we may mount homeward."

This Sol did at once, and his request was granted, so that after one farewell lingering look at the cottage, the Sun's children began their upward journey. Perhaps some of the Earth's dust clung to their feet, perhaps it was because sliding downward is ever easier than climbing skyward. However this may be, it is certain that the royal pair found it hard work indeed to climb the rainbow stairway, and only reached the Sun's Palace in the nick of time, since the great gates were already closing.

Once within, they sought their royal father without delay, and to their joy found Luna already there on one of her rare visits. Without their grandmother's pleading it would have

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been altogether impossible to obtain their fiery parent's consent to their remaining upon Earth and their marriage with mortals; though he forgave them readily enough for their visit after he had rated them soundly. But the Sun had great respect for his mother's opinion, and already had talked off in harmless if hot words the worst of his anger; so, since Queen Luna favored the plan so heartily, he at last gave a reluctant consent.

"But mind you," said the Sun King, "no half-way measures. No more rainbow bridges, for I'll cut off the ends of every one before they reach the Earth. Take your choice—a kingdom here or a slice of desert land down there—which shall it be?"

"The desert with Frida," said Sol.

"The desert with Friga," cried Soltus.

"Dear boys!" murmured the Moon grandmother.

"Idiots!" thundered the Sun; but he was, after all, a King of his word, and they had his promise.

In fact, he was better than his word, as I must tell you, for he secretly gave orders to

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have a volcanic eruption in that part of the desert that Mother Holle had spoken for as the twins' property, and saw to it that the sand was covered deep with fertile soil. Then at his command the rain fell, the winds blew seeds of flowers and fruit thither, and the great Sun King himself shone out upon all right royally, so that a wonder work equal to any magic was wrought in no time, and it was a very fairyland of loveliness, and no barren waste, to which Sol and Soltus brought their brides. For that Mother Holle kept *her* word goes without saying, and that Frida and Friga were willing you may have already guessed.

It therefore only remains to say that the Children of the Sun never repented of their choice, but, having built their homes side by side, shared all the good things about them, one with the other, and lived happily together forever after.



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